

# THE KIDNAPPED CAMPER



FLAVIA A. C. CANFIELD





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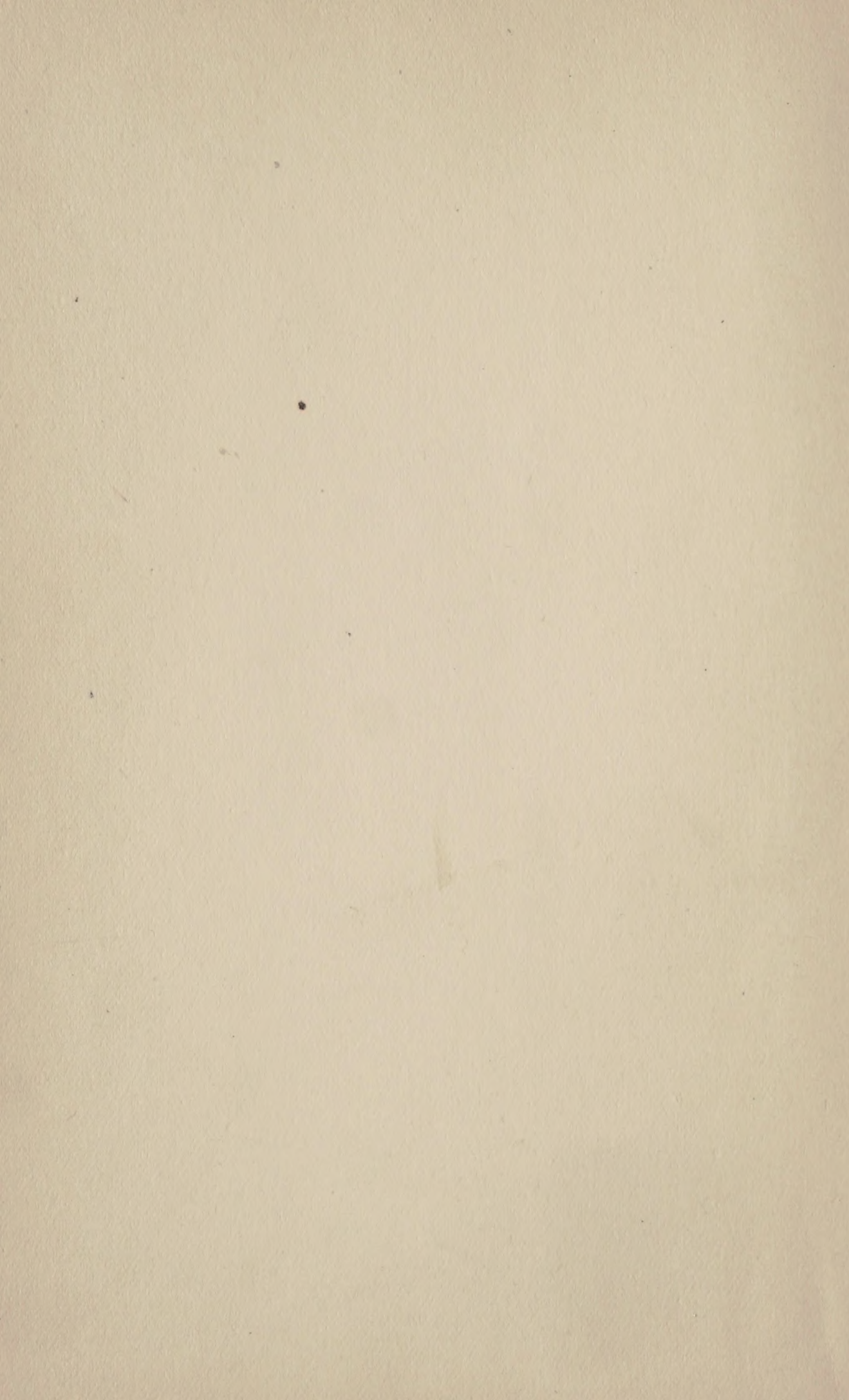
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[See p. 19

“LET’S HAVE SOME FISH!”





# THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS



A STORY OF  
OUT-OF-DOORS

BY  
FLAVIA A. C. CANFIELD

ILLUSTRATED

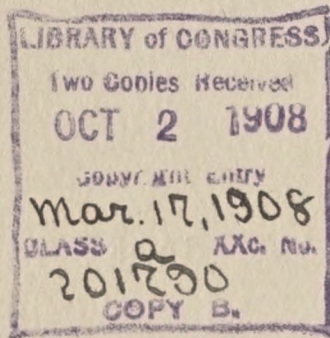


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TO  
MY LITTLE GRANDSONS  
CHARLEY AND BOB







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THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS







# THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

## CHAPTER I

### A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

“**A**RCHIE, don’t you want to go with us for a ride this morning?” called his father from the front porch.

“No, I’m tired of the auto,” was the peevish answer of the boy, who lay languidly stretched out in a hammock under the trees before the house.

“That’s the answer I get to everything I propose lately,” said Mr. Stebbins, turning to Archie’s delicate little mother, who sat beside him. “He isn’t interested in anything. I don’t know what to make of it, for I don’t believe he’s lazy.”

“I’m afraid it isn’t the right climate here,” said Mrs. Stebbins, in a troubled tone. “Archie



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seems to be getting thinner, and his eyes are no better."

"Perhaps we ought to change doctors?" suggested Mr. Stebbins.

"I don't see the use of that," replied his wife. "Dr. Jones is very faithful, and he seems to know all the new medicines."

"I don't believe in experimenting with new medicine," said Mr. Stebbins, rising. "The old, tried remedies are quite good enough. Suppose we take Archie to Summit when we go to visit mother. I'd like to have our old Dr. Pond see him. He has a lot of horse-sense, and of course any amount of experience."

Mrs. Stebbins shook her head. "No, I should want to see your doctor first myself."

"Well, we can send for Archie if you like old Dr. Pond," said Mr. Stebbins, with an air of decision.

"Yes, that would be the best plan," agreed his wife. "I think we would better start to-day. I shall never have a moment's peace until Archibald begins to improve."

"Very well. I'll telephone at once for the auto. We can safely leave the boy with Kate and the doctor for a day or two, and come after him, or return to go on with Dr. Jones, according as we decide."

"I can tell as soon as I see Dr. Pond, if he



## A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

will do," said Mrs. Stebbins, as she hurried into the house to make preparation for her journey.

Within an hour the anxious parents left for another New England village where Mr. Stebbins's mother lived, leaving the forlorn little boy in the dark as to their plans for him. He was very lonely and discontented, and spent most of the afternoon looking idly down the dusty road where their automobile had disappeared.

The next morning about ten o'clock Archie was under the trees again, when, to his amazement, a young man suddenly appeared, coming so softly in his canvas shoes that the child had not heard his approach.

"Hello, sonny! How are you?" asked the stranger.

The drawling tones were so good-natured that Archibald almost smiled as he turned his pale little face toward the young man, who stood in the shade of a big elm-tree.

"I'm pretty well," said the child.

"Look rather peaked. Been sick lately?"

"No, I'm not sick." Archibald spoke fretfully, and turned from the gate on which he had been swinging and walked listlessly toward the house.

The stranger followed and soon overtook him,



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continuing to talk in friendly tones. "Don't see how I could have made such a mistake. Any one could see with half an eye that you're no baby, and, of course, you don't want to be called sickly."

Archie looked up at his pleasant caller, shading his red eyes with a transparent hand. "I can ride a bicycle," he said, in a cheerful tone.

"'Course you can. I knew that the minute I got a good look at you. Your pa must be proud of such a boy as you are. I expect he's got a lot of money to build such a fine house as that," pointing to a white cottage among the trees.

"Pooh! That's nothing! That's Aunt Kate's house. You ought to see ours at Rochester. It's lots bigger and prettier than that."

"And you are visiting Aunt Kate with your pa and ma, ain't you?"

"We're all visiting Aunt Kate. But my father and mother aren't here now. They've gone to Summit, to my grandmother's."

"Yes, I see. And you have to stay and take care of Aunt Kate."

Archie swelled with importance. "I'm not afraid of tramps and burglars, like Aunt Kate!"

"Anybody would know that by looking at you. I'd like to see the tramp you couldn't drive away! That's Aunt Kate looking at us now through the window, isn't it?"



## A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

"No, that's Minna. She's the hired girl. Aunt Kate has gone to the sewing-society."

"Minna isn't afraid of tramps, is she?" asked the stranger.

"No, she's Dutch," said Archie, contemptuously. "She can't talk English much. I don't suppose she ever heard of a tramp."

By this time they were on the piazza, the boy curled up in a big chair, and the young man seated on the railing, fanning himself with an old straw hat.

"I suppose Minna won't mind my being here?" he asked.

"No. *She* never comes out here, and we always have lots of callers on the piazza."

"What's your pa's first name?"

"Archibald," said the little boy, promptly; "and I'm named for him. My name's Archibald Forrest Stebbins, but everybody but mother calls me Archie."

"Look like your pa, too, don't you?" said the stranger.

"Do you know my father?" said Archie, excitedly, going closer to the stranger.

"Know him by reputation, sonny. You'll be surprised when I tell you what I'm here for."

"Oh, do tell me, quick. Has father sent me a pony-cart? He said he'd bring me one."

"No. Better than that. Your pa says I can



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take you on a fishing trip. We'd better start right off, for perhaps we will make some stops on the way."

"Oh," exclaimed Archie, "I'd like to go! But mother said I had to stay here so the doctor could tend to my eyes every day. I wonder why she changed her mind."

"What does the doctor do to your eyes?" asked the stranger.

"He puts drops in 'em."

"Does it hurt you?"

"Well, if it does, I don't let him know. I'm not a cry-baby."

"No, of course not; and your father wants you to be a real boy and learn to hunt and swim and fish this summer."

"Oh, what fun!" said Archie. "But how strange for them to let me do these things! They never would before. Mother's afraid I'll drown if I go near the water, and the doctors all say I mustn't exercise, or it will heat my blood and make my eyes worse."

"I guess your folks have got a doctor now with some sense," the young man said, rising and putting on his hat. And then he added, looking at his watch: "If we catch that train we must hustle. You better tell the hired girl your uncle has come to take you to your pa."

"Shall I call you uncle?" said Archie.



## A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

"You may if you like."

"I'd like to. I have only one uncle, and I'd like another."

"All right. Folks call me Weary sometimes. You better tack the 'uncle' on that name. You can tell Minna to put us up a good lunch, can't you?"

"But aren't we going to wait for Aunt Kate?"

"I'll leave a note for Aunt Kate if she isn't here. You get me pencil and paper, and I'll write it now while you see about the lunch. Ask the girl to put in cold chicken and boiled ham, if there is any in the house."

The paper was produced, and the young man wrote:

MISS STEBBINS,—I am here to take Mr. Stebbins's son away. He has found a good doctor, and is anxious to try a new treatment for his eyes and general health. I am sorry I can't wait to see you, but Mr. Stebbins is anxious to lose no time.

W. WILLIAMS.

Archie now came into the room with a large paper parcel. "Will this be enough, do you think, Uncle Weary?" he asked.

"Yes, I guess that 'll do. Now we must get your clothes and start. I'd better go with you and pick 'em out."

Archie led the way up the stairs as fast as his thin legs would carry him. His large, airy



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bedroom had a closet containing his clothing, which the stranger entered at once and brought out an overcoat, a straw hat, and a heavy pair of shoes.

"Shall I wear this suit I have on?" said Archie. It was of white duck, with a blue silk necktie, and looked very fresh and dainty.

"No. That 'll never do for fishing and hunting. Let's see if we can find something more to the purpose."

He went into the closet again and came out with a plain gray suit, which Archie said he wore on rainy days.

"This is what you want. Hop into it, quick, and put on the hat and shoes, while I fold up your overcoat."

The little fellow needed some help with the dressing, as in his excitement his fingers fumbled with the buttons. But they were soon ready and out on the piazza, when the young man paused. "Oh, I forgot something," he said. "You better bring along your bank. You may need your money."

Archie ran back and returned in a moment with a red box, which was heavy with dimes and nickels, and handed it to his new guardian for safe-keeping.

"How much have you here?" asked Uncle Weary, putting it in his coat-pocket.



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"I don't know; but there must be a lot. It hasn't been opened since Christmas."

"Well, you'll need it all, I expect, for fishing-tackle and rubber boots."

At this the heart of the little boy thumped with excitement and expectation as he walked down the village street with his companion, who answered his string of questions with the greatest good-humor.

When they reached the post-office Archie was told to stay outside by the door while Uncle Weary went in to inquire for some letters he expected, and to get another boy who was waiting for him. In a moment he came out with a little fellow somewhat taller than Archie, but just as thin and pale. "Now you two kids walk down the street to the station, and when I get my letters read I'll overtake you," said the young man.

The boys eyed each other silently at first, and then Archie broke the ice by asking, "What's your name?"

"Eddie," answered the child, timidly.

"Mine's Archie. Are you going with us?"

"I suppose so. The man said my uncle Charley told him to take me away from here."

"My father sent for me, too. Where does your uncle live?"

"At Shackville."



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"Is that near Summit, where my father is?"

"It's ten miles from there."

"Where do your father and mother live?"

"They're dead," said Eddie, sadly. "Uncle Charley sends me to school here. I board at Mrs. Sims, over in that brown house. She is real mean to me, and I'm glad I'm going away."

"Was she mad at you for leaving?" asked Archie.

"She doesn't know I'm going yet. The man met me on the way to school, and said he was in such a hurry I'd better write her about leaving. He told me what to say, and I mailed it in the post-office, where he told me to wait for him."

"Did you have money enough to pay your fare on the cars?"

"I don't know. I gave the man two dollars that Uncle Charley sent me to buy shoes, and he said it would pay part, anyway, and he said he'd carry my watch for me, too. I never rode on the cars. I'm kind of 'fraid to."

Archie spoke with much surprise and some contempt. "Never rode on the cars! Why, how did you get here?"

"Uncle Charley brought me in his wagon. Shackville isn't on the railroad."

"Huh! I've been more than a hundred miles on the cars. I've been to San Francisco, and I've been on the ocean. I've been to Europe."



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Eddie looked at his companion with great admiration and respect, and just then Uncle Weary joined them. "Well, boys," he said, "I've got some great news for you, but I haven't time to tell you now, for there comes the train, and we've got to hurry."

There was barely time to buy tickets and jump on board. Eddie was very much frightened and sat trembling on the edge of his seat, but fortunately for him the train soon stopped, and they all got out at the station of a little country village.

"What place is this?" asked Archie.

"Come along with me and I'll tell you," said Uncle Weary. "Your pa and your uncle think it will be good for you both to camp out a little, and I'm to look after you. We're going to walk part of the way."

"But we can't walk," said Archie, in dismay. "We'll never get there."

"You don't know what you can do till you try. I'm going over to that store to buy some things. If anybody asks you questions, don't answer. I don't want you should speak to any one."

The young man's manner had changed entirely. He was still good-natured and quiet, but there was an air about him which told them he expected to be obeyed. This was a new ex-



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perience for Archie, and he felt rebellious, but there seemed to be nothing else to do, so he trotted along with Eddie, and they entered the country-store, where all sorts of things were for sale.

Uncle Weary bought first two substantial market-baskets, and placed in them his purchases as fast as they were made. The eatables were a loaf of bread, a piece of pork, a sack of corn-meal, some coffee, sugar, and salt, and a bottle of syrup; and to these were added fishing-tackle, a frying-pan, a coffee-pot, an iron kettle, and some tin cups and plates.

"These your boys?" asked the friendly store-keeper, peering over his glasses at the little fellows.

"They're mine by adoption. Sickly kids. I don't know's they're worth raising."

"I'm not sickly," began Archie, indignantly. But the young man grasped his arm with such force that the child cried out with pain.

"What's the matter, bub?" said the merchant, kindly. "Something hurt ye?"

"I'll give him a dose that 'll do him good! Come on, children," said the young man.

"Live 'round here?" asked the store-keeper, following them to the door.

"No, we don't. We're just travelling for our health."

"Campin' - out and roughin' it, I s'pose.



## A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

Good idee. Wish I could do that with my little girls. One on 'em is always ailin'. A good spell of sleepin' and eatin' in the open air would be the makin' of her, but my wife—"

"Is that the main-travelled road to Melton?" interrupted the young man.

"Yes, that's it. Go straight ahead. You can't miss it. Any o' your folks livin' in Melton?"

"No, beyond there."

"Pretty long walk for them puny young ones, ain't it?"

"We'll stop overnight on the way."

"Now, boys," he said, as they walked on, "I want you should understand one thing. You've got to mind me or there'll be trouble. Your folks want I should act as your father while you're in my care. I told you to keep still and not talk, and the first thing Archie did was to contradict me. Now I won't allow disobedience again without punishment, you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Eddie, softly.

"Well, I don't want you to say I'm sickly," said Archie, angrily.

"It makes no difference what you want, young man. You must obey me."

"You said you were going to be a father to us. Well, my father never makes me mind."

"No, I see he doesn't; but he expects me to



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make a good, sensible, sound boy out of a pretty weak, spoiled specimen, and the first doctoring I do is to make you obey orders."

"My father wouldn't like to have you telling lies about me."

The child spoke with clenched fists, his little body trembling violently.

"You're an impudent boy, and if I don't do anything more, I'll take that out of you." As he spoke the young man took a knife from his pocket, opened the blade, and cut a long switch from a shrub at the wayside and began to trim off the leaves.

"Now I don't want to use this on you, and if you're a good, sensible boy like Eddie, I won't have to," he said.

"I was never whipped in my life," said Archie, fiercely.

"There always has to be a first time, you know, but I don't believe you are going to be so silly as to need a whipping. All I ask of you is to keep quiet and not speak unless you're spoken to, and always obey orders whether you like 'em or not. If you don't trust me and do as I say, you can't have the good times I was planning — fishing and hunting and swimming and camp-fires, and all that."

The child was silent. He did not care for the whipping, but he was afraid if he spoke he would



## A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

cry, and he could not endure the disgrace of that. Besides, he would rather do almost anything than give up the sports that had been promised him.

Presently the young man said, "Well, which shall it be? Are you going to obey orders like a man and have a good time?"

Archie did not answer at first, but after a while he looked up to his questioner's face and deliberately said, "Yes."

"See that you do," was the only comment on his surrender.



## CHAPTER II

### CAMPING-OUT

ABOUT half a mile from the village they came to a small river, where they halted, and Uncle Weary helped the children to climb over a stone wall into a green meadow which sloped to the water's edge. He seemed familiar with the spot, and led the way to a shady nook behind a clump of willows, where they could not be seen from the road.

The boys were almost exhausted, and sank down on the grass at once.

"Now you stay here till I see about supper," said their guardian. "Don't speak a word till I get back;" and, taking an empty basket with him, he immediately disappeared.

The word "supper" revived the spirits of the children somewhat. They obeyed instructions and did not speak, and lay quietly watching the ripples on the water and the shadows of the trees in the woods back of them; but, after awhile, they became very much excited over the ad-



## CAMPING-OUT

vances of a gray squirrel, who came quite near them, and then ran away with skips and bounds when he saw that they were boys, and not logs, as he had at first supposed.

In a short time the young man returned with his basket full. "Now, boys," he said, briskly, "skip to those woods and bring me a lot of dry sticks and chips for a fire."

Archie could not see well enough to make much headway at this task, but Eddie was very quick, and soon had an armful of fuel, part of which he gave to Archie to carry. They found Uncle Weary busily preparing some potatoes and ears of green corn for cooking. Eddie knew how to build a fire, and soon had one crackling between two stones. The new kettle and coffee-pot were scrubbed with sand and then filled with water, and the vegetables put on to boil.

"Now let's have some fish," said the young man, going to the woods with his knife open. He brought back two poles of the right length and thickness, and fastened the fishing-lines on them. Then he cut pieces of salt pork for bait and told the boys to go to work.

Archie was wild with delight as he dropped his hook in the water, and screamed with excitement when his first little sun-fish lay flapping on the bank.



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"Here, bub," called Uncle Weary, "you'll never be a fisherman if you yell like that. Don't you know you'll scare all the fish off?"

Eddie was used to the sport, and was very quiet. He ran with a beaming face every time his companion drew a fish from the water, to take it off the hook for him and knock its head on the pole to kill it.

"See, Uncle Weary," said Archie, coming up to the camp-fire, "I've caught six, and Eddie has only five."

"Well, you better not brag about it. You didn't take one off the hook, did you? If Eddie hadn't done that for you he would have as many as you."

"Well, I'm going to take 'em off the next time, and then I'll get the most, too."

"When you do, it 'll be time to crow," said Uncle Weary, dryly.

He had some slices of salt pork sizzling over the fire in the frying-pan, and the little shiners the boys brought were prepared very quickly and put on to fry in the hot fat.

"Did pretty well for beginners," said the young man, as he deftly turned the fish over. "We'll go down the river to-morrow, maybe, and get some bigger ones. Now you kids get out the plates and cups, and we'll have supper in no time."



## CAMPING-OUT

Everything smelled delicious as they gathered round the heaped plates, and they all ate heartily. At first Archie hesitated. "I'm not allowed to have anything fried," he said, as the delicately browned fish was put on his plate.

"That's all right when you are at home, but you can eat everything when you're camping-out. Go ahead. It won't hurt you."

The child obeyed this order very cheerfully, and enjoyed a more abundant meal than he had ever done in his life before. Eddie, too, cleaned his tin plate in an astonishingly short time, and looked wistfully at the sandwiches and cake of Archie's luncheon.

"Here, sonny, take some more," said Uncle Weary, helping him again to fish and potatoes. "You look as though you had never had enough. Fill up for once."

The little boy laughed joyfully and ate all that was given him, including a large slice of Minna's nice cake. Some fine red apples were found in the bottom of the basket, and the children were told to take all they wanted.

"Mother doesn't allow me to eat any but stewed fruit," said Archie, looking longingly at the bright apples.

"She wants you to eat everything on this trip," said the young man, briefly; and Archie



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did not stop until he had devoured three of the apples, while Eddie ate four.

"Gracious! I guess you youngsters had better quit before you split your little jackets," said Uncle Weary, good-naturedly. "I want you to do the chores now—wash the dishes first, then get a lot of wood for the fire for morning. After that I'll show you how to dig bait. If you're good boys I'll let you fish again to-morrow."

The children were entirely rested now, and went cheerfully to their tasks, especially to the last one.

Uncle Weary took them to an old decayed stump and found in the rich soil around it a number of long angle-worms. Eddie picked them up eagerly and put them in an old tin can which some picnickers had left.

"Archie, why don't you help Eddie?" said Uncle Weary. "You're not afraid of a little worm, are you?"

The boy backed away, with his hands in his trousers-pockets. "No, I'm not afraid, but I never touched a worm, and I don't think I'd like to."

"All right. Eddie and I'll do the fishing to-morrow. If you're too nice to handle bait, you'll never be a fisherman."

"Can't we use pork bait again?"



## CAMPING-OUT

"Not when we can get good angle-worms like these. We have to eat the pork ourselves."

"I'll handle the worms to-morrow," said Archie.

"You'll have to, if you do any fishing."

"Here's enough, Uncle Weary," said Eddie, coming up with a can full of wriggling creatures, which were trying to escape and which the boy put back.

"Yes, that will do. Now cover them with earth, and tie a piece of paper over them so they can't get out."

Archie felt the deepest admiration and envy, as he watched the operation, and resolved that he would take the horrible, slimy, repulsive things in his hands to-morrow if it killed him, but not to-night. He'd have to think about it a little longer.

After a while Uncle Weary went off into the woods, and when he came back, with his arms full of spruce boughs, it was growing dark and the mosquitoes were beginning to sing.

"Whew!" said he, as he threw his burden down near a clump of bushes. "I guess we'll have to make a smudge to keep off the skeeters."

Eddie understood all about smudges, and presently had some damp leaves on the live coals, making a dense smoke. Archie's eyes were already smarting, and the smoke made them



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worse, but it was better than mosquito bites, and, though he was very sleepy, he sat patiently with Eddie on a log until Uncle Weary should be through with his pipe and tell them what to do next.

"Hullo!" said the young man, at last, seeming to remember them. "You look rather droopy. I suppose it's time to go to bed. That bush over there 'll make a good hotel, I guess. It's up by the timber, and a little dryer than it is here by the water."

"Why, ain't we going to sleep in a house?" said Eddie, in dismay.

"House nothing. We're camping-out, aren't we? People don't sleep in houses when they're camping. You go to bed now on those spruce boughs, and you'll find it a good one."

Eddie began to cry. "Oh, Uncle Weary, don't make me sleep there. I'm afraid of the bears in the woods."

"Now look here, young man, none of that whimpering," said Uncle Weary, sternly. "You're not a baby. You're nine years old, aren't you?—a year older than Archie. He isn't afraid. Stop your crying, or you'll have to sleep alone under another bush." This awful threat was so terrifying that Eddie wiped his eyes, gulped down his sobs, and helped to arrange their rude bed.



## CAMPING-OUT

"Uncle Weary, I forgot my night-gown. What shall I do?" said Archie.

"Shucks! You don't need night-gowns when you sleep out-doors. Birds and squirrels don't have night-gowns, do they? Go to bed now, and don't let me hear from either of you till morning."

They cuddled down in their clothes among the soft boughs, Archie's protecting arm over the shuddering Eddie, who soon forgot his troubles in a sound sleep. Archie's inflamed eyes and burning mosquito bites kept him awake a long time, listening to the mournful cries of the whip-poorwill and trying bravely to keep from being homesick. He raised his head at last, and saw Uncle Weary down by the camp-fire evidently smoking another pipe. When he finished that he went toward the boys with a cup in one hand and a wet handkerchief in the other. The cup contained strong salt-water, with which he bathed the swollen little faces and hands, and laid the handkerchief over Archie's eyes.

"There," he said, not unkindly, "I guess you can get to sleep now."

The relief was so great that Archie dropped off immediately, and knew nothing more till the morning sun shone in his face. Eddie sat up soon after, and they were both bewildered until they saw Uncle Weary asleep near them on a



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bed like their own, and then they remembered where they were. Their movements wakened the young man, who said, sleepily, "It's too early to get up boys. Take another nap." But, seeming to have a second thought, he added, "If you want to you may try starting the fire. I guess there's some coals left under the ashes."

Eddie was soon raking them out, and, showing Archie how to put on dry twigs at first, afterward larger sticks, he presently had a fine, blazing fire. Archie's eyes were better. Eddie's tear-stained face had a hint of red in it, and they both felt ravenously hungry when Uncle Weary woke and joined them.

"What shiftless fellows you are!" was his first remark. "Why aren't you washed and combed?"

"There's no wash-bowl or towel," said Archie.

"You'll find a towel in that basket, and what's the matter with the river for a wash-bowl? Come along with me." And, taking them to a sandy spot near the edge of the stream, he thoroughly washed his hands and face and neck, using the yellow soap freely. The children followed his example as well as they could, and then all used a little comb which Uncle Weary carried in his pocket.

Then the preparations for breakfast began. First the boys were shown how to peel and



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slice the cold potatoes for frying. The kettle was used to cook hasty-pudding in, and they were told how to make coffee. The children felt as though they could not wait until the meal was ready, but they set out the plates and cups, and settled down on the grass as patiently as possible.

"Breakfast is now ready in the dining-car!" sang out Uncle Weary, at last, and the youngsters rushed for their tin plates, which they held out greedily for the hot mush. It was a very familiar dish to Eddie, but Archie had never eaten it before, and he thought it the most delicious food he had ever tasted, especially as he was allowed to have all the black syrup on it that he wanted. The potatoes, hot coffee, and Minna's sandwiches came next. The boys had never tasted coffee before. It was thought to be rank poison for children in Archie's home. But Uncle Weary told them a little would not hurt them, and would be better than river water. So they each drank a cupful, well sweetened, and finished the meal with all the apples they wanted.

"Now, boys, when you get the work done up I'll tell you the programme for the day. You wash the dishes and get a lot of wood and chips ready while I have my smoke."

As he spoke, in his quiet, drawling tones,



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Uncle Weary filled his pipe and sat down on a log in the shade. It was now about seven o'clock, and the day promised to be hot and dry. But it was still cool in the woods when the children gathered the fuel, and the process of cleaning the dishes was very simple. They took them to the river's edge and scoured them with damp sand and pieces of newspaper. Then they stacked them neatly under the willow and came to Uncle Weary for further orders.

"Through so quick? Well, you've done pretty well for such little shavers," he said, good-naturedly. "We'll stay here to-day. It's going to be too hot to walk. Now you pull off your shoes and stockings and go to fishing."

Eddie was used to going barefooted, but it was a new experience for Archie, and at first a painful one. But he did not complain, and when the sharp stones cut his tender white feet he only shut his lips tightly and said nothing. A harder ordeal was before him when the bait was brought out. But he went through it bravely, although he was so nervous that the first worm he tried to handle fell on his foot and made him jump and scream. But he mastered his nervousness and managed to fasten his bait on the hook, and in a moment was completely absorbed in the sport.

The fish were plentiful, and the boys had



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enough for dinner in about an hour; when Uncle Weary, with the towel in his hand, strolled toward them.

"Bite pretty well, don't they?" he said. "You've got enough for to-day. Eddie, you take the fish to the camp, cover them up close in the kettle so the dogs won't get them, and then we'll go in swimming."

Eddie obeyed joyfully, and in a few minutes was stripping off his little shirt-waist and trousers. But Archie hesitated. He wanted very much to learn to swim, but it seemed a tremendous undertaking to plunge into that dark water. He had never had a bath except in the luxurious bath-room at home or the plainer one at Aunt Kate's. The doctors had prescribed a certain temperature for the water, which was regulated by a thermometer, and there were days when he was not thought strong enough for this, and had to be sponged with alcohol.

But he would not show the "white feather." If Eddie, the coward, could "go in swimming," it wouldn't hurt him. So he made himself ready and stepped gingerly over the grass to the stream, where the other two were already splashing about.

Uncle Weary laughed when he saw him. "Well, if you ain't the skinniest little chipmunk I ever saw. Come along and let me souse you."



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He took the little fellow in his arms, and, wading to a deep place, jumped up and down with him, the water going sometimes entirely over their heads.

"Don't hang on like that, Archie," said Uncle Weary. "I ain't going to drown you. See Eddie. Don't you want to swim like that?"

Archie's teeth were chattering with fright, but he controlled himself and did not scream, and when he was put into a shallow place, where he felt safe and stood on his feet, he began to see there was no danger. The water was warm, the sand soft under his feet, and the overhanging trees kept off the hot sun. And then he suddenly realized that this was the best fun he ever had in his life. Eddie's sweet face had a very happy expression as he came swimming up to ask how he liked it.

"Do you think I could learn to swim, Eddie?" asked Archie, wistfully.

"'Course you can. I'll teach you. It's just as easy!"

But Uncle Weary would not allow that. "Not to-day, boys," he called. "Archie must get used to the water first. He's had enough for to-day. If this don't hurt him I'll let him go in to-morrow."

They had an early dinner, with all the fish and roasted potatoes and apples they could eat, and



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afterward Uncle Weary and Archie took a nap, while Eddie amused himself by throwing stones into the river.

It was still hot at four o'clock, but they took a walk in the cool woods, where the children filled their pockets with all sorts of treasures, and Uncle Weary looked for a patch of red raspberries, which he found after awhile. They ate some of the ripe fruit, and then walked on until they came to a wire fence. It was rather old, with long strips of the wire lying loose on the ground. Uncle Weary wound up several yards of this into a coil and tied it with a string, which he took from his pocket.

"What are you going to do with that, Uncle Weary?" asked Eddie, who, for the first time, ventured to ask a question.

"You'll see," was his answer.



## CHAPTER III

### JIP ARRIVES

**A**FTER supper, as they sat near the smudge, Uncle Weary was more sociable than he had been through the day. "Want to know what I'm going to do with this, Eddie, do you?" he asked, untying the coil of wire. "Well, you watch me, and perhaps you'll find out. I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Squirrel would like to know, too."

"Oh, I see!" said Eddie. "You are going to make a trap. Are you going to put it in the woods to-night?"

"Will it be like the mouse-trap our cook sets in the kitchen?" asked Archie.

"You boys ask too many questions," said Uncle Weary. "You just watch, and you'll find out a thing or two."

He laughed as he spoke, and seemed so good-natured that the little boys laughed, too, and came as near as they could without getting in the way of the skilful fingers, which were weav-



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ing a snare such as farmer boys make. The material he had was too coarse for the noose which would go round the neck of a captive, so the young man took a fine, slender wire from his pocket and fastened it securely to the larger one.

"Uncle Weary, did you know you were going to make this trap when you picked that up to-day?" asked Eddie.

"I always have things that will come in handy. It isn't safe to leave string or wire or nails or such things round where I am. They always go into my pockets. I learned that when I was a boy on the farm."

"Did you always live on a farm, Uncle Weary?" said Archie.

"Do I look like a farmer? Well, I was one till I was eleven. Father moved to town then."

"Did he keep a store?" Eddie asked.

"Why, was your pa a store-keeper?"

"Yes, he had a grocery store in Shattuck."

"I suppose you stole raisins and candy, as all grocers' boys do?" said the young man.

Eddie laughed, and then said, sadly, "I was too little for that when pa died."

Uncle Weary stirred the smudge to make it smoke, and remarked: "I expect you boys would be surprised if I should tell you I'm a doctor. Don't be scared, Archie. I'm not going to dose you. I only give medicine to horses and cows."



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"How funny!" laughed Archie. "I didn't know horses and cows had doctors. How do they let you know when they are sick?"

"Send their children for the doctor, of course. Didn't you ever hear a calf bleating out 'baa, baa'? Well, he's like as not calling for the doctor for his ma." This was such a funny idea that the children had a good laugh over it, and then Archie asked:

"Do you like being a cow doctor, Uncle Weary?"

"You never saw any one who had just what he wanted, did you? I taught school two winters. You needn't turn pale, Eddie. I'm not going to make you learn the multiplication table. But the doctors said I must live out-doors, so I had to give up teaching and do what I could. Now it's Archie's turn to tell us what his pa is," said Uncle Weary.

"He's a banker. He was a soldier once, and some people call him colonel now. I'm going to be a soldier when I grow up."

"It's time you were learning to obey orders, then, if that's the case. You know you have to do just what your superior officer tells you, without asking any questions or any back talk. I shouldn't wonder if that's one of the reasons your pa wanted you to come with me this trip, to teach you your first lesson in soldiering."



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Archie had nothing to say about this, and, as the snare was by this time finished, they all went into the woods to hide it in the bushes. "There, now," said the young man; "if we have good-luck we'll have a pot-pie to-morrow. Go to bed, kids; we want to get a good start in the morning."

They were all soundly sleeping before the dark really settled down, and it seemed as though their eyes had barely closed when the morning light wakened them. Uncle Weary was seated before a good fire, a fine rabbit by his side, and a fresh supply of vegetables in a basket near at hand.

"Why, Uncle Weary! You've been to the market, haven't you?" Archie exclaimed.

"And the trap caught that nice rabbit, didn't it?" said Eddie.

"You boys ask and answer your own questions in the same breath, so I don't have to waste mine. Now I want you to wash as quick as you can, and see if you can't get breakfast all by yourselves. If you're smart about it I'll show you how to skin the rabbit, and we'll have it for dinner."

With a little help, the children prepared the corn-meal, the coffee, and the fried potatoes. Three eggs were boiled in the coffee in their shells, and there were plenty of delicious apples. Then Uncle Weary took his jack-knife from his pocket, and, after sharpening it on his boot, be-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

gan to skin the rabbit. The boys watched him eagerly, asking questions which were sometimes answered and sometimes laughed at. But they began to feel acquainted and much more free to talk than on the first day. Stockings and shoes came off again when it was time to fish, and finally Uncle Weary was ready to "go in swimming."

"I can learn to swim to-day, can't I?" asked Archie, eagerly.

"I guess so. Seemed to do you good yesterday. But you mustn't stay in long the first time."

The lesson was given in shallow water near the bank, under Uncle Weary's directions, with Eddie acting as an example. Uncle Weary kept one hand under Archie's chin, while he told him how to use his arms and to kick out like a frog. It was soon over, and Archie lay panting on the grass, exhausted, but happier than he had ever been in his life. The dinner was excellent. The boys thought rabbit stew, with corn, potatoes, salt pork, and crusts of bread, all cooked together, was the most delicious dish they had ever tasted. They all ate of it until not a spoonful was left and the bones were picked clean. While they were eating their apples they saw a little dog lurking in the woods.

Archie jumped up and exclaimed: "Oh, Un-



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cle Weary, see! That looks like Aunt Kate's Jip! Do you suppose he has followed us?"

"Go toward him and see."

Archie whistled and called: "Jip, Jip! Come, good-fellow!" But the dog only wagged his tail and whined.

"No, it isn't Jip," said Archie; "but he looks like a nice dog. I wish he'd come to us."

Uncle Weary rose and, walking quietly toward the woods, spoke in a friendly tone and patted his knee.

The little fellow came out from his cover, inch by inch, and finally crouched at the young man's feet.

They were all around him now, petting and giving him bones and bits of cold mush. He seemed almost famished and ate all they gave him greedily.

"Oh, do let's keep him!" said Eddie.

"Not much! We don't want any such dirty, tough specimen as that," began Uncle Weary. But just then the little outcast rubbed against his leg, and wagged his stumpy tail with so much confidence that the young man stooped down and patted his head, saying: "Well, all right. If you boys will take care of him and see that he doesn't get into mischief, I'll let him stay awhile and see how he behaves."

They named him Jip at once, and the boys



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

began playing with him. But that was stopped quickly by Uncle Weary, who said: "Now, you wash the dishes and I'll wash the dog. You mustn't touch him again till he's clean."

This was more easily said than done, for Jip didn't like the water, much less the yellow soap which got into his eyes. He struggled and cried as hard as he could, but it was of no use. He had to obey Uncle Weary, as every one else did, and came out of the water shivering and very unhappy, but much improved in wholesomeness. He was tied to a tree with a string and left to dry, while Archie was sent to bed for a nap, which lasted until about four o'clock. Then Eddie wakened him by shaking his shoulder and saying: "Archie, get up, quick! We've got to leave here right off."

The child sat up bewildered. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"A man has just been here and says this is his meadow, and he don't want us to stay any longer."

"Where is he?" asked Archie.

"He went away, but he said he was coming back in an hour, and if we wasn't gone he would have us arrested."

Archie jumped up at this, and the boys ran excitedly to Uncle Weary, who was leisurely packing the baskets. "No hurry, boys," he said,



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in his usual drawl. "Lots of time. I know of a better place than this. I was going there tomorrow, but we'll get a good start to-night. Cooler travelling in the evening, anyway."

While he was talking he unrolled a paper and took out a little girl's sunbonnet. It was clean and whole, but faded and patched.

"Made a dicker with a farmer's wife for this. Sold her a receipt for a new kind of soft soap. I want you should wear it, Archie. It 'll be better to keep the sun and wind from your eyes than your hat."

The boy started back. "I won't do it," he said, angrily.

"Well, I guess you will. I guess I can find a way to make you do it," said the young man, picking up a stick that lay near him.

"No, you can't! You may whip me till I'm dead, but I won't wear a girl's sunbonnet."

Uncle Weary threw down the stick. "Well, I'm surprised," he said, in a tone of disgust. "You pretend to be a manly boy, and you behave just like a girl. Girls act without reason, and so do you. You'd better be a boy in girl's clothes than a girl in boy's clothes."

"Uncle Weary, couldn't he wear my hat? It's got a broader brim than his," said Eddie, timidly.

But the young man brushed him aside without



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reply, and continued to Archie: "Besides, you promised to obey orders. I supposed you were the kind of a boy that would keep his word. You might know I wouldn't ask you to wear the bonnet without a good reason. A manly boy would know girls' clothes wouldn't make a girl of him, and he'd do as he agreed and ask no questions; but I see you're not the chap I took you for."

Uncle Weary turned away and began tying covers on the baskets.

"I'll wear it," said Archie, in a stifled voice, and stood with hands clenched and his little form rigid while the ignominious garment was fastened on him.

Nothing more was said, and the little procession took up its march, first climbing the stone wall and then tramping down the sandy road.

Uncle Weary led the way with the baskets, and Jip brought up the rear, the only cheerful member of the party.



## CHAPTER IV

### WAG, FOR SHORT

ARCHIE'S moody face was hidden under his sunbonnet. He was trying to keep back angry tears, for he felt positively disgraced and longed to escape. It did not occur to him to run away, for he had given his word to stay and "obey orders." He was too proud to beg, and he felt sure that would do no good. There was no escape and nothing to do but bear as courageously as possible whatever came to him, and to hate himself and his tyrant with all his might. Eddie was very woe-begone, too, and they all trudged in silence, until they came to a patch of berries which grew by the roadside. They scrambled through the bushes, so that they could not be seen by passers-by, and began to gather the ripe fruit.

"See that house over yonder?" said Uncle Weary. "Well, I'm going there to make some inquiries. I'll soon come back. You must stay here and keep out of sight. If the dog barks,



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don't speak or call to him, and don't say a word to each other."

The boys continued to gather berries in silence after he was gone, and they had the coffee-pot half full when he returned with a lot of eatables in an old tin pan. He found the children seated on the grass, Eddie playing quietly with Jip, and Archie looking glum and miserable.

Uncle Weary put the pan down and took off the paper covering, saying, cheerfully: "Nice old lady over there. See what she sent you."

Eddie jumped up, exclaiming, rapturously, "Oh, pie!" But Archie looked off in another direction.

"See! and doughnuts and cheese and cake," continued Eddie, putting his hand on Archie's shoulder and pointing to the tempting food.

But Archie would neither look nor eat. "I'm not hungry" was all he would say when a plateful of good things was placed in his lap.

Uncle Weary put his hands in his pockets and looked quizzically at the child. "I wouldn't act like that, bub, if I were you," he said, quietly. "It ain't sensible. You're cutting off your nose to spite your face. Now, I was going to let you wear your hat again in a few days, when your eyes get better. They were improving very fast, but they will be as bad as ever if you pout and won't eat. I guess you'll have to



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keep on being a sissy as long as you act like one."

"When can I wear my hat again?" said Archie, looking up breathlessly.

"That depends on yourself. I should think in a couple of days or so, when we get to the place where we're going. But you'll have to chirk up and eat and sleep all right, or I don't know when I'll let you wear it."

The boy's relief was almost too great for words, and his only answer was to begin to eat greedily. His mother would have been shocked if she could have seen her delicate little son at his supper. But two days and nights of gypsy life go a long way toward changing the habits of small boys. He could not remember when he had been allowed to have all he wanted of things he liked, and, now that he was happy again, he took advantage of his opportunity.

After supper Uncle Weary brought out a cracked teacup which he said the old lady had given him. In it was an ointment made of mutton tallow, which he put on Jip's back. The little fellow kept perfectly still while the boys held him. He evidently liked the feeling of the soothing stuff, and barked and wagged his tail in appreciation when the operation was over.

They walked until dark after that, and slept under a hay-stack in a field near a red barn.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

For breakfast they had bread and butter, left over from the night before, which tasted very good in the cool morning air, especially as they had some berries to eat with it. When they had finished these they were much surprised to have their cups filled with warm milk poured from the coffee-pot, and to be told to drink all they wanted of it.

“My! How good that tastes! Where did you get it, Uncle Weary?” said Eddie.

“Didn’t you hear the milk-wagon go by awhile ago? You ought to have got up when I did. But we mustn’t let the milk-wagon get ahead of us. We want to get on while it’s cool.”

Jip had caught a chipmunk, on which he made a good breakfast, and seemed in wildest spirits as they started out on their day’s march. His poor little back was much better, and, since he had plenty to eat and had found such kind friends, he looked and acted much more like a self-respecting dog. The children had great fun with him, throwing sticks and stones in the road ahead, which he would run and pick up; and when he grew tired of this he would dart across a meadow or through the woods after birds and squirrels, always coming back quickly with happy little barks and antics which made them all laugh.

Uncle Weary seemed to enjoy playing with



## WAG, FOR SHORT

him almost as much as the boys, and they all reached a deserted stone-quarry about noon in very good spirits.

"This is all right for a camp if we can find any water," said the young man, looking around. "Anyway, there must be a watering-trough near. We haven't passed one for some time."

He started off with the kettle, and came back in a few minutes with enough to make mush and to wash their dusty faces and hands. The dinner was not as good as usual, but they had plenty of apples and berries, and after their sleep in the afternoon they felt much refreshed. There were clouds in the sky, and the air was cooler when they started on about four o'clock. But they had not gone very far before Archie asked: "Are we almost there, Uncle Weary?"

"Tired, sonny?" asked the young man, kindly.

"Just a little," said the boy, stoutly; but his lagging, stumbling steps showed that he was almost exhausted, and made his guardian halt and look about for a resting-place for the night.

"There's a school-house over there," he said, presently, pointing to a little red building a few rods away. "Guess we'd better make for that; it looks like rain, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to get under a roof." Eddie put his arm round Archie; Uncle Weary took one of his hands in his own, and, almost lifting the tired little boy, they



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

managed to get him to the steps of the school-house.

"Most deserted spot I know of, after four o'clock," commented Uncle Weary, as he broke open the door. They went into the small, bare room, where Archie was made to lie on one of the low benches, with his overcoat rolled up for a pillow. He immediately fell asleep, while the other two unpacked the baskets.

"Rather slim picking for three able-bodied men, isn't it?" said the young man, as they gathered the remnants of the eatables on the tin plates. There was a small piece of pork, a few crackers, and a handful of corn-meal. Uncle Weary looked at them with a cheerful smile as he said: "Looks as though I'd have to go to the grocery store, don't it?"

He started for the door, but stopped, exclaiming: "I swan! I believe we're going to have a thunder-storm right off."

They had been too busy to notice the sudden darkness. But now the wind rose and blew the shutters of the windows with a banging noise, and the thunder and lightning were terrifying to poor Eddie, who turned pale and began to cry.

A sound of flapping wings made Uncle Weary listen at the door. "Those must be pigeons. I guess they have nests round here," he said. "Eddie, you stay and take care of Archie till



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I get back. I'm going to the woodshed to look for squabs."

"Oh, don't go and leave us! I'm so afraid," moaned the child.

"What you frightened about? A little thunder isn't going to hurt you, is it? Do you want Archie to be sick? Well, he will be if he doesn't have a good supper. You get a fire started before I come back."

Eddie dried his tears, found some kindlings in a box, together with some dried sticks of wood, and, with a match he found in the basket, had a fire crackling in the stove when the young man returned with half a dozen little birds.

"Just as I thought," he said. "Pigeons have some nests in the woodshed. Now make a rousing fire and put the kettle on with some water. You'll find it in that pail over there."

The child forgot his fright as he hurried to make himself useful, and while the young man prepared the birds the other put the pork in the kettle with the water, and then began to look for what the school-children might have left of their luncheons. He found a number of slices of bread and some remnants of pie and cake in the desks and brought them to Uncle Weary, who said: "Yes, that's right. That'll help out a good deal. Shouldn't wonder if we had a good supper, after all." He stirred the corn-meal into the



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stew, added the plump birds, and soon the little room was filled with such a delightful odor that Eddie, who was always hungry, felt he could hardly wait until the meal was ready.

But his patience was not greatly taxed, for the squabs were tender, and it was not long before the crusts went into the stew and Uncle Weary announced that it was time to "dish up."

The wind had gone down and a steady rain was falling, and when Archie was awakened it was almost dark because of the heavy gray clouds. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and then smiled delightedly as he smelled the stew. His nap and the good supper seemed to make him over, and after eating he sat on the bench very contentedly while the dishes were washed and baskets packed.

By seven o'clock the storm was over and the long summer twilight began.

The weather had been hot and dry for more than a week, and the rain was much needed to lay the dust in the roads and make the crops grow. The little boys thought it had come for their benefit, too, for the air was delightfully cool when they came out of the school-house. They pulled off shoes and stockings and paddled in the pools of water lying in the road. They talked of playing hide-and-seek back of the shed, but Uncle Weary said they were too tired for that and must go to bed early.



## WAG, FOR SHORT

"We're going to sleep in the school-house, ain't we?" said Eddie.

"Sleep in a house! Not much. Bad air and a hard bed when you can get a soft one, and all the good air there is? What are you thinking about!"

"But it's so wet out-doors," argued Eddie.

"What if it is! Do you good. Keep you green and juicy to get wet once in a while. You don't want to be a dried-up old man before your time, do you?"

The children always enjoyed Uncle Weary's joking, and by this time they knew he would take good care of them whatever happened; so, after he had knocked the ashes from his pipe and turned up his trousers, they followed him through the wet grass across a brook to a clump of lilac-bushes which had evidently belonged to a house long ago burned. A few stones and charred timbers were all that remained. Back of these ruins was a little tumble-down stable, where they found some dry straw which made nice beds for them, and they soon slept, with the lilac-bush their only shelter, and with sweet sounds and scents all about them.

Archie looked and felt like another person in the morning, when Eddie waked him with the leg of a broiled chicken thrust under his nose. He was only half awake when he looked up into



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the bush above him, and the story of Elijah, which he had learned in Sunday-school, came into his mind.

"Where did that come from?" he said. "Did the ravens bring it?"

"No, of course not," laughed Eddie. "Uncle Weary got it and cooked it this morning. Ain't it good!"

Archie took the smoky, scorched morsel and ate it ravenously, while Eddie stood by smiling.

"We've got a lot of good things down by the brook," he said, when Archie had picked the bone clean. "Uncle Weary said to tell you breakfast will soon be ready."

"Where's Jip?" asked Archie.

"Oh, he's found a squirrel and has got it most eaten up." Eddie felt very happy to be the bearer of so much news, and led the way to the little stream, where they washed their faces in the cold water, and came to breakfast looking clean and rosy.

They found the tin cups filled with warm milk, a pot of hot coffee standing on some coals, a plate of roasted ears of corn, and two chickens, which had been cut into joints and cooked by holding them on forked sticks over the fire.

"What's that?" said Archie, wonderingly, as he watched Uncle Weary turn over a big, slightly scorched piece of dough in the frying-pan.



## WAG, FOR SHORT

"Don't you know a pancake when you see it? You haven't travelled much, I see."

"It looks awful good," said Eddie. "I hope there's lots of syrup to put on it."

"I'm hungry enough to eat a good, hot pancake without any syrup. I guess, if you must have it, though, you'll find some in the bottom of the bottle. But you must fill up on plain things. This cake is to top off with."

There were plenty of "plain things" for everybody, including Jip, who seemed to think chicken bones an improvement on raw squirrel. Mrs. Stebbins would have called the cake, with its heavy inside, totally indigestible and unfit for the human stomach, but her little son ate a large slice of it with great relish, and would have been glad to get more if there had been any left.

They were still sitting on the grass near the road when a boy about fifteen years old came in sight, with a bay horse and a spring-wagon which contained several cans of milk and a basket with rolls of butter done up in white cloths. The boy jumped out and loosened the check-rein on the horse as he came near the group on the grass, looking at them with a wondering grin.

"Where you going, sonny?" asked Uncle Weary, as the boy led the horse to the brook to water him.



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The new-comer did not answer, but continued to stare.

"Want to swap?" asked Uncle Weary, taking his jack-knife from his pocket.

The eyes of the boy glistened. "How'll you trade?" he asked, showing a knife not nearly so good as the other.

"Goin' up Melton way?" said Uncle Weary, casually, as he came to the wagon to examine the knife.

"Yep. Goin' to take milk and butter to the hotel."

"Summer folks there yet?"

"Whole lot on 'em."

"About three miles from here, isn't it?"

"Three and a half."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll trade knives with you if you'll give us a lift to Melton and throw in a pound of butter to boot."

The boy scratched his head and said: "I have to have money for all the butter I sell."

"Well, here's a quarter. Now, that's more than fair. A knife and a quarter for a ride and a pound of butter."

"Can't you make it thirty cents?" said the boy.

"Humph!" said Uncle Weary, shutting up his knife and putting it in his pocket. "I guess you don't want to trade very much."





“THEY ‘FILED’ IN”







## WAG, FOR SHORT

"Well, see here. A ride three miles and a half is worth a whole lot," protested the boy, as Uncle Weary turned away.

"I see you don't know the worth of a good, new four-blade of the best make. Go on with your old cart. I don't ask any odds of you."

"Well, pile in," said the boy. "I'll take the quarter."

The baskets and boys were packed into the back of the wagon. Uncle Weary took his seat by the driver, and the big horse started up the road at a good trot. But he soon fell into a walk when they came to a long hill, which proved to be one of many. The whole distance to Melton seemed to the boys one continuous climb. But the ride was delightful after the dusty tramp of the day before. They sat in the back of the wagon with their feet hanging out, calling and whistling to Jip, while Uncle Weary talked to the farmer's boy, who was very sociable and friendly now, and gave his companion a great deal of useful information about the farmers whose houses they passed, particularly as to where cross dogs were kept.

The two were quite on joking terms when at last, about eight o'clock, they reached the pretty little mountain village of Melton. When the horse stopped they all jumped to the ground, and while Uncle Weary was getting out his things



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

and the boys were putting on their stockings and shoes, the farmer's boy took his basket to the side of the road to get the roll of butter. He found a piece of paper and a string in the wagon, and presently gave the young man a neat package.

The knives were then exchanged, the quarter changed hands, and the boy got into the wagon and took up the reins.

"What's your name, bub?" said Uncle Weary. "I hope we'll see you again this summer."

"My name's Lem Judkins, but some folks call me Scalawag — Wag, for short," said the youngster, grinning over his shoulder as he drove off.



## CHAPTER V

### STAGGERS

“COME on!” said Uncle Weary. By this time the boys were not surprised at anything they were told to do, and trotted without question by his side until they came to a street-car track half hidden by weeds and grass.

“Sit down here, kids, and wait till ‘Time in the Primer’ comes along in his ‘One-hoss Shay,’” said Uncle Weary, filling his pipe and lighting it.

The children had no idea what he meant, but they laughed, and, after playing with Jip on the grass for a while, Eddie began to teach Archie to play mumble-the-peg.

They were very eager over the game, and became so absorbed they did not notice that a white horse attached to a tiny street-car was jingling toward them. As it came nearer they understood Uncle Weary’s remark. An old, white-haired man was driving a nag as bony and wheezy as himself. The track ended where Uncle Weary and the boys were; and while they entered and



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

took their seats, the old man led the horse round to the other end of the car, hitched him to it, and started back.

"He doesn't remember me," said Uncle Weary, in a low voice, "but never mind. Just as well. Keep still, boys, and don't you answer any questions."

The car went through the principal street of the village, passed a large, white hotel, a number of shops and public buildings quite close together, and then jingled into the residence quarter, where, among the quiet, plain New England houses, were scattered a number of modern cottages standing in pretty, well-kept lawns.

Uncle Weary rose and walked to within talking-distance of the driver.

"Those look like summer-houses," pointing to the left.

"They be."

"Folks here yet?"

"Some on 'em."

The young man reached into an inner pocket and brought out a cigar, which he handed to the old man with a friendly nod.

The driver took the cigar, and looked at his passenger for the first time with an air of interest. "Live around here?" he asked.

"No; come for a few weeks with these children."



## STAGGERS

"Goin' to stop at the hotel, I s'pose."

"I guess not. It looks rather too rich for my blood."

"Cur'us for me to make such a mistake, but I took you for one o' them city swells," chuckled the old man. "They're mostly too grand to speak to country folks; but, now I look at ye, I see you're not dressed up much. I guess you're just common folks, like the rest on us."

The old man cackled merrily, and Uncle Weary, laughing too, said: "You've hit it right this time, old fellow. Common people are good enough for me."

The children were at the other end of the car, trying to keep Jip from jumping off. The driver glanced at them and remarked, by way of showing his interest in his new acquaintances, "Them young ones of yourn look rather peaked, and by the looks o' their clothes I guess they haven't got any ma."

"They're all right," said the young man. "We all have to wear rough clothes, for we're going to pick berries on the mountain."

"That so! Well, there's a lot on 'em to pick this year, and a lot needed, too, at the hotel. I guess we're goin' to have a pretty good season."

They were the best of friends when they reached the end of the line about eight o'clock. There were no other passengers, and the little



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

boys walked freely about, one of them always with a tight grip on the dog, and while their elders were chatting they ran to the back platform or kneeled on the seats to look out of the windows at the pretty cottages and flower-gardens they were passing.

Presently Uncle Weary noticed that the old horse was going very slowly, occasionally stopping entirely, and remarked, "Your old nag has seen his best days, hasn't he?"

"He's not so old, but he's good for nothin'! Plumb played out! The boss told me I'd better not take him out to-day, but I thought it was goin' to be cloudy and sort o' cool, and perhaps he could stand one trip. But the sun's come out hot, and I dunno as I can git him home."

The poor beast was staggering blindly now, and presently fell on the sand by the side of the track, apparently dying as the two men freed him from the harness.

"I guess his time's come at last," said the old man. "I s'pose I ought to put him out of his misery. I got an axe along. The boss told me to knock him in the head if he had any more o' them fits again." He started for the car, but stopped, and, shaking his head, continued: "I swan! I can't bear to do it. I've drove him ten-odd years. He's as kind a critter as ever drew breath."



## STAGGERS

"I see," said Uncle Weary, sympathetically. "You don't want to kill him, and you wouldn't want to see it done, either, and I don't blame you. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You walk back to the barn and get another horse for the car, and I'll see that the old fellow sha'n't suffer long."

"You ain't strong enough to bury him alone," protested the driver, looking critically at the thin, stooped shoulders of the young man.

"Don't you worry about that."

The old man still hesitated. "I ought to pay you," he began.

"Never mind. I don't want pay," broke in Uncle Weary. "Just tell your boss he'll never see his old nag again. He's gone where the good horses go."

"Well, if you'd just as soon, I guess I'll let you do it. You'll find an axe and a shovel under the seat. You better put the harness in the car." And without another word, and turning his back on his dying comrade, the old man pottered sadly down the track.

Uncle Weary called after him: "We sha'n't be here when you get back. We're going on up the mountain."

The old man nodded assent without turning his head, and went on.

The boys had been told to stay in the car with



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

Jip, and did not understand the situation. But Uncle Weary called to them now to bring him the baskets, and, taking out the kettle, the coffee-pot, and the frying-pan, he told the children to follow him. The street-car track stopped at right angles with a highway which skirted the foot of the mountain. They turned into this and ran a few yards until they came to a watering-trough under a tree by the side of the road. Here they filled their utensils with the cold, clear water which ran from a pipe into a hollowed log and hurried back to the horse, who was feebly gasping. The water was dashed over his head, the towel, which had been wet at the trough, was bound round his forehead, and then Uncle Weary poured some brandy from a flask into the empty syrup bottle, added some water to it, and succeeded in getting the mixture down the animal's throat. He choked and snorted, but seemed to revive at once, and before long, with a little help, was able to rise.

"What's the matter with him, Uncle Weary?" asked Eddie.

"I should say it was a case of too much dieting," said the young man, dryly.

"Do you mean he doesn't get the right things to eat?" asked Archie.

"The old bag of bones looks as though he didn't get half enough of anything. Come along,



## STAGGERS

Mr. Staggers, and let's see if a drink of cold water won't set you up."

By much coaxing and dragging at the halter, they managed to get him to the trough and put his nose in the water, when he began to drink feverishly. "Well, I swanny!" said Uncle Weary. "They've been stingy even with their water. When it don't cost 'em anything, either!"

The horse seemed to feel better after drinking, and, walking feebly to the side of the road, began to nibble at some grass.

"Your time hasn't come yet, old fellow, if you can eat and drink. Come along now and get washed up. You need that about as much as victuals."

Uncle Weary led him back to the trough and, with the towel, gave the old fellow a thorough sponge-bath, while the little boys fed him handfuls of grass. He was so refreshed now that, with a good deal of coaxing and urging, he walked slowly along the road until they came to a grass-grown path which seemed to lead through the woods up the mountain-side. Uncle Weary turned into this, saying: "We're most there now, boys. Keep up your courage, old Staggers, and you'll soon be in the best home you ever saw!"

The boys were very anxious to know more, but they had learned by experience that there was very little satisfaction in asking questions.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

So they made no comments, and walked up the winding path in the cool shade of large trees. Eddie led Staggers, as they decided to call the new member of the family, and Uncle Weary carried the bundles and baskets, as Archie had all he could do to carry himself.

Jip was in the wildest spirits, and darted here and there, losing himself in the underbrush and then appearing in the road above them, his little red tongue hanging out, and his sides shaken with his panting breath as he waited for them to join him.

It took them a long time to reach their stopping-place, for Staggers was too weak to walk more than a few yards without resting; but at last, about noon, they arrived at a level spot—a sort of clearing—where there were many stumps of trees half covered with raspberry-bushes. The space was perhaps half an acre in extent, letting in a broad sweep of sunlight, which contrasted brightly with the gloom of the forest which lay around, except on one side, where the mountain rose steeply.

“Stay here while I go and see if it’s all right,” said Uncle Weary, at the edge of the clearing.

He came back in a few moments looking very much pleased. “It’s all there, boys,” he called. “Bring Staggers along.” And he led the way, through tangled vines and brush, to a shallow





"IN THE COOL SHADE OF THE TREES"







## STAGGERS

cave in the mountain-side, with a wide, high opening.

The sides of the cave were of pale-yellow glistening rock, and the gravel floor was dry and clean, as the sunlight flooded it during the morning hours.

Near the entrance were some smoky stones and some ashes, showing that the place had been inhabited. Uncle Weary began placing the stones together for a fire and unpacked the iron kettle. He seemed so happy and so much at home that Archie ventured to ask, "Have you ever been here before, Uncle Weary?"

"'Course! This is an old camp of mine. Here six weeks with a chum last summer. I see nobody's been around since."

"How can you tell?"

"I know by the looks of things. Besides, everybody in these parts is afraid to come here. The cave has a bad name."

"Why?" asked both the boys.

"It used to be called 'Rattlesnake Den.'"

Eddie looked round apprehensively and asked, "Are they here yet, Uncle Weary?"

The young man laughed. "You needn't be afraid, you little coward. Peters and I cleaned them all out."

"But doesn't some one own this land?" asked Eddie.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"It belongs to some orphans in the city. I was told their guardians are lawing over the title, and no one comes around. We never saw a soul the whole six weeks we were here last summer."

"Does father know about this place?" asked Archie.

"He'll know about it soon. But we've stood here fooling long enough. Come with me to the spring."

They found it in the woods, a few yards away. It was a large one, with its water cold and clear—a stream running from it down the mountain-side.

"Our butter must be pretty soft by this time," said Uncle Weary, taking the package from the basket. "But if we put it on a stone in this cold water it will harden it up by the time we are ready to eat."

The boys were very hungry and tired, but they had learned to be patient, so Archie lay down on a bed of spruce boughs and Eddie picked berries until the mush and coffee were ready.

A number of hard crusts were all that were left of the bread.

"Lucky we have something to make them go down," said Uncle Weary, whistling as he went toward the spring.

When he came back with the butter he looked



## STAGGERS

very sober. "I've found a hole in my pocket," he said. "Eddie's watch and my compass are gone. Look around carefully among the leaves. I'm afraid, though, I dropped them when we were doctoring the old horse."

They all searched everywhere, but could not find the lost articles.

The little boy was greatly distressed and could not keep the tears back.

"Never mind, Eddie," said Uncle Weary. "That was an old watch. I'll give you a new one in place of it."

"I don't want a new one," said Eddie, sadly. "That was pa's watch. It's all I had of his."

"Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk," said the young man, rather harshly. "It's gone, and it can't be helped. You want to be a man now. You're not a baby."

The first meal they took in Rattlesnake Den, as they called the cave, was rather a sad one. Eddie tried to be brave, but his tears kept dropping into his mush, and Archie's appetite was quite gone. Uncle Weary ate very little, but drank a lot of strong coffee, and then told the boys he was going to a farmer's near there to get something to eat. Archie was told to take his nap, and when the young man was gone Eddie led Stagers to the spring for a drink, and when



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

he was quite alone he laid his head on the old horse's neck and had his cry out.

He felt better after that, and was in quite cheerful spirits at their nice supper, with pie, cake, and doughnuts for dessert.

Staggers, too, had a good meal of warm "mash," into which Uncle Weary put a white powder.

"Is that medicine?" asked Eddie.

"Well, it's not just what you'd call candy, but I guess it 'll make the old fellow feel better to-morrow."

The whole family, including the horse and dog, rested on soft beds of leaves that night, and Eddie soon forgot his troubles in a dreamless sleep in the pure, out-door air.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST TROUT

**D**URING the next ten days they were all busy with work and play, and the time passed quickly.

There were a great many raspberries in the clearing, and the boys had been set to picking them in the mornings. It was hard for Archie at first, and he had so little strength that he was allowed to rest often; but in a few days he was able to gather a whole quart without stopping, and at the end of a fortnight he could keep at it until he had four quarts, which was the amount required daily.

Eddie did not mind the work, and his nimble fingers usually finished the task first. He would have liked to help Archie, but the latter had too much pride to allow this, and worked away patiently until he could get through almost as quickly as Eddie.

After dinner they usually rested for a time, when the boys were always glad to talk with Un-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

cle Weary, and were never tired of hearing him tell stories.

One afternoon, soon after going into camp, they were lying on a little grass-plot near the spring when Archie asked, "Uncle Weary, can't we go fishing to-day?"

The young man rolled over and squinted up at the sky, which was overcast with clouds. "Pretty good day for trout," he said, by way of answer to the question.

"Trout!" echoed the little boy, very much excited. "Are there *really* trout near here?"

"Of course. What are mountains for but to gather cold water for trout-brooks."

"Oh, let's start right away!" cried Archie.

"Time enough," said Uncle Weary, easily. "Don't be in a hurry. You can't be a good fisherman if you're nervous. We'll rest a little longer, and then we'll get our things together and start."

Archie settled down on the grass again, saying, "I wish I had one of Uncle George's jointed rods here."

"You don't need it. There's one growing for you not far away just as good as any new-fangled, split-bamboo, nickel-ferrule rod you could find in a store."

"Your uncle is a great fisherman, isn't he?" asked Eddie.



## THE FIRST TROUT

"I should think so," said Archie. "He has all kinds of tackle. He showed me once a hook he used to catch a big salmon in Norway."

"What kind of a fish is a salmon," said Eddie. "I never saw one."

"You've fished for 'em in a tin can, haven't you?" asked Uncle Weary.

"Oh yes," said the little boy, laughing. "But how do they look in the water, and are there any of them in this State?"

"Well, they're a kind of elephant trout—that is, they belong to the same family. But you can't find 'em in this part of the world. You'll have to put up with the 'small fry' in the salmon family."

"Uncle George had all kinds of flies for trout-fishing," said Archie, as he watched the preparations that Uncle Weary now began to make.

"No flies on us," said Uncle Weary. "We're going to fish in the woods, so good old angle-worms will have to do. Eddie, you get us some over by the spring, and put 'em in a tin can and bring 'em along. Archie and I will go ahead and cut the rods. You will find us down the mountain by the thicket of alders."

Eddie was very quick to finish his task, and soon joined the others. He found Uncle Weary trimming some slender, straight alder shoots,



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

on which he afterward showed the boys how to tie the lines, which were of fine silk about six feet long. Then he fastened the small hooks on with a little double-water knot. The boys knew how to thread the worms on the hooks so that the points were covered. Uncle Weary took from his pocket some shot split nearly through, and showed the boys how to pinch them together over the line just above the hook, to serve as sinkers; and at last each, with a rod over his shoulder, was ready to march "Indian file" through the woods.

As they went on they heard the noise of water running over stones, and presently they caught sight of a beautiful brook flowing among trees and bushes down toward the meadow below.

"Keep quiet!" whispered Uncle Weary. "Trout are a shy fish. They're lying in pools, like that at the foot of the little rapids, watching for food to be swept down to them. Now, Archie!"

Archie crept eagerly up on the bank, with his pole ready.

"Just let your line swing free and drop your bait into the current. Let the water sweep it down, and steer it toward that dark hole under the rock."

The boy's fingers were all thumbs at first, but presently they guided his bait down to the pool,



## THE FIRST TROUT

and as it sank into the dark water there was a flash underneath and a sudden pull. Archie jerked his pole violently upward, shouting, "I've got a trout!" and then he looked astonished, for there was nothing but a circle of ripples on the water, and the hook was caught fast in the branches overhead.

"I told you it wouldn't do to be nervous when you're fishing," said Uncle Weary. "You must learn not to snatch your hook away from the trout. Give him a chance, and handle your pole more gently. Now you've scared the fish here. We'll move down to another pool."

They made their way cautiously farther down the stream, where Uncle Weary pointed to a basin of deep water beneath a fallen, moss-grown hemlock that lay across the brook.

"There's a likely place," he said. "Keep cool!"

Archie tried hard to control himself as the bait moved down into the dark water. There was a sudden tug. Archie let the fish dart to and fro in the shadow until he could feel that it was securely hooked, and then swung a fine trout out upon an open space on one side. The boy thought he had never seen anything so beautiful as that olive back and the vermilion spots of the sides and the ivory white along the fins.

"It must weigh all of a quarter of a pound,"



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

said Uncle Weary, as he showed the little boy how to string the fish on a forked stick.

"I wish I had a photograph of him to show to Uncle George," said Archie, still gazing at his prize.

"One good turn deserves another," said Uncle Weary. "You'd better catch some more, now that you've learned the trick of it. If you don't look out, Eddie 'll get ahead of you. I expect he's got a lot of them by this time. Now, I'll go off and fish, too, and we'll see who can do the best."

Eddie needed no lessons in fishing. He had caught many strings of trout on his uncle's farm. He seemed to have the knack of the real fisherman, and knew how to make the fish take his bait. So at the end of the afternoon, when it was time to go home, he had a string of trout almost as long as Uncle Weary's.

Archie had done very well for a beginner, as Uncle Weary told him, and followed the others back to camp a very satisfied and happy little boy.



## CHAPTER VII

### IMPROVEMENTS

AFTER that the boys often went fishing in the afternoons, and Archie seemed never to tire of the sport. They always had so many more trout than they needed that Uncle Weary sold them at the hotel, together with the berries picked in the forenoons.

He always brought back groceries and household supplies, so that, with the fish and berries, and the squirrels and rabbits which were snared in the woods, they had plenty of good food.

The little half-acre had been very much improved, so that it looked almost like a well-kept garden. Uncle Weary had brought home a pair of pruning-shears and trimmed the ragged bushes, and tied them to stumps and stakes driven into the ground, so that the children could easily gather the fruit.

The underbrush was cleared away and the dead branches burned. There was a house for Jip, a rabbit-warren made of wire in which three little bunnies were kept, a coop held an old hen



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

with a dozen chickens, which had been brought home from one of Uncle Weary's expeditions, and a nice little garden flourished by the door of the cave.

Uncle Weary said he could not wait for seeds to grow, so he told the children one day, soon after they came, that he was going to pass around the contribution-plate. They knew this was one of his jokes, and were not surprised at night when he came home with a lot of vigorous plants, which he set in beds already prepared for them. The ground was so rich, and they had such good care, it was not long before there were lettuces, radishes, and young onions for the table; and a flower-bed with nasturtiums, geraniums, and phlox was the joy of Eddie's heart.

The little dog was well now and happy. The children were very fond of him, and taught him all sorts of tricks, like shaking hands, jumping over sticks, and standing on his hind legs. He was very handsome and remarkably intelligent, learning new tricks as fast as they were shown him. A favorite game was hide-and-seek, when he would jump into barrels and boxes and run behind trees and into the cave exactly as the boys did. One day he jumped from a box to Stagers' back. Another time he rolled a barrel round the clearing with his hind feet, much to the children's astonishment.



## IMPROVEMENTS

When they told Uncle Weary, he called the dog to him and looked him over carefully. "He's blooded, all right," was his comment. "I thought as much. I expect he's a trick dog. Probably strayed away from some show."

"Will we have to give him up?" asked Archie, anxiously.

"If they come after him, of course. He's worth a lot of money."

"But they can never find him here, can they?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not. I guess they cast him off when he got scalded, thinking he'd never be good for anything again."

"Oh, I hope so," said Eddie, earnestly. "Anyway, they don't deserve to have him any more. He would have died if you hadn't been so good to him and cured him."

"I think myself it was pretty lucky for Mr. Jip to fall into the hands of a dog doctor."

"And he really belongs to us, doesn't he?" said Archie.

"Well, he isn't good for much, but if you boys like him I'll let him stay if you'll tend to business and work hard."

The boys promised fervently, and Jip continued to sleep between them at night and was their constant companion by day.

Staggers slept a good deal, but he had a fine appetite, and ate heartily of the warm "mash"



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

Uncle Weary gave him every day, and by the end of the first week the boys were able to ride him slowly round the clearing.

One day Uncle Weary was more busy than usual. He had found somewhere a big brass kettle which he used to wash clothing in. He filled this with water and walnut bark, and put in a powder he had bought at the drug store in the village. The whole was placed over a fire and kept simmering for several hours. When the liquid was cool he proceeded to give Staggers a bath with it. The horse did not seem to mind, and when he became a rusty brown color kept on nibbling grass as though nothing had happened.

When the boys brought their berries to the cave at noon they were greatly astonished, and Eddie exclaimed: "Oh, look at Staggers! What's the matter of him, Uncle Weary?"

"Why, I think he looks better than he did, don't you? Now I'm going to see what I can do for Archie."

The child was rather pleased. He had always disliked his red hair. Boys had sometimes called him "sorrel-top," and when they wanted to tease him particularly they would pretend to burn their fingers by touching his head. He could never understand why it was his mother's pride and delight, and submitted, with a very poor





"HE PROCEEDED TO GIVE STAGGERS A BATH"







## IMPROVEMENTS

grace, to having it cut square across his neck and forehead instead of cropped close in a manly fashion, like his father's.

After dinner Uncle Weary seated him on a stump and, with a pair of shears bought the day before, quickly clipped the bright, thick locks and threw them in the fire. Then he used the same dye that had transformed Staggers, and made the boy's hair a dark brown.

Archie was breathless. Would he be allowed now to be a boy again! He had worn patiently and stoically the hateful little girl's sunbonnet for two weeks. He had hoped every day that he would be freed from this degradation, but he had not dared ask for it. His guardian said nothing, and Eddie never mentioned the matter, and Archie was sometimes afraid that it had been forgotten. But now he was almost sure he was to be rewarded for his patience. The boyish cut of his hair and the bundle by Uncle Weary's side were enough to give him hope, and when a pair of overalls and a little hickory shirt were taken from the parcel and he was told to put them on he was too happy for words.

"There, now, you look like a man and not like a baby," said Uncle Weary. "Your pa'll be pleased when he sees you. You ain't much like the sickly little kid we started with."

"Doesn't he look nice," said Eddie, admiring-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

ly, as Archie strutted around with his hands in his pockets.

"He don't want to put on airs and get stuck up over his clothes," said the young man. "Handsome is that handsome does. Don't forget now all I've told you. I don't want you should answer questions, anyway, more than you can help. If folks talk to you, just play you're bashful and don't say anything. Eddie will be all right, but Archie likes to talk too well. I want him to promise to keep his mouth shut and let Eddie do all the talking when you meet folks that question you."

"I don't see why I can't talk for myself," said Archie, moodily.

"All right. It seems you're not man enough to keep your word and obey orders. You have to argue like a girl about what you don't like to do. Pretty kind of a soldier you'd make! I'm getting sick of my job of trying to make anything but a baby of you."

"Oh, I'll promise. I'll do what you say, Uncle Weary."

"You're sure now? I don't want to be talking to you all the time. When a man says he'll do a thing that ought to be the end of it. Are you going to obey orders without back talk after this?"

"Yes, I will," said the child, eagerly.



## IMPROVEMENTS

“ Well, I’ll try you once more,” said the young man. “ I am going to send you both to the hotel with the berries. Now, remember, Eddie’s to do every bit of the talking.”

The boys promised obedience, and they started with well-filled baskets for their first trip to the village.

Archie’s own father and mother would not have recognized him that day. He had lost his languid, delicate look, and his dark, short hair showing a little under his big farmer’s straw hat, his brown eyes now almost well, and his tanned and freckled face, all so changed him that he would be taken almost anywhere for a rugged country boy; especially now that his hands and feet were much swollen and scratched by briars, and he had lost two front teeth since he left home.

Uncle Weary had given directions to take the berries to the back door of the hotel, and tell whoever met them that they had been sent by Mr. Williams, and were to wait for the money. Afterward they were to go to one of the village stores and buy some coffee and some sugar.

“ I don’t see why Uncle Weary won’t let me talk,” said Archie, as they walked along the shaded road.

“ Nor I, either,” said Eddie. “ I can’t bear to speak to strangers, and you’d do it so much better than I can, anyway.”



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

Archie was somewhat appeased by this tribute, and said, as he threw a stick for Jip to run after, "Well, I don't care as long as he doesn't make me wear a girl's sunbonnet."

"I wonder when our folks will write for us to go home," said Eddie.

"I hope it will be a good long time," answered Archie. "It's lots more fun to stay here than at Aunt Kate's. Do you want to go back to school?"

"No, indeed," said Eddie, emphatically. "I never had such a good time in my life. I wish Uncle Weary would keep us all summer."

"He says he means to stay here till the berries are gone, and that 'll be two or three weeks longer, I guess."

"He's going to get a wagon and an axe and a gun, isn't he?" said Eddie.

"Yes, so he says."

"I don't see where the money for all that is coming from," remarked Eddie.

"My father sends it to him, I s'pose."

"Your father is rich, isn't he?" said Eddie, in a tone of respect.

"Yes," answered Archie. "He's the richest man in Rochester. We live in a great big house, and we have lots of servants and horses and carriages and autos and everything."

The boy looked round instinctively to see if



## IMPROVEMENTS

Uncle Weary was within hearing. His tendency to boast had been very much subdued by the sarcasm and blunt reproofs of his new guardian, and he had almost a fear now that he would rise out of the ground and quench him.

When they reached the long village street they found, on the well-kept lawns, groups of summer boarders playing tennis and croquet. Archie recognized a number of his mother's friends whom he had seen at various summer resorts. But in his present disguise they had no idea of his identity, and showed no curiosity about the two little country children trudging by, merely glancing at them as a very familiar sight.

The hotel was at the end of the street, a very large building with green blinds, most of which were tightly closed.

After wandering around the house several times the boys came to a door which they decided was the right one, and Eddie knocked timidly. There was no answer, and the knock was repeated several times. After awhile a pretty, rosy-faced girl opened the door.

"Well, I thought I heard some one rapping," she said. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Williams sent us with these berries," murmured Eddie, in a low tone.

"And why didn't you come to the kitchen door? We always take the berries in there.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

But I'll let you go through the dining-room this time, if your feet are clean. Come this way."

They were led through a long, clean room, which was dimly lighted and cool and silent, and were ushered into a large kitchen, also clean, but well lighted and very warm.

"Here's that mountain man's berries," said the girl to a stout, middle-aged woman, evidently the cook, who remarked:

"Well, it's lucky they got here in time. I was afraid we wouldn't have enough for dinner. Are you Mr. Williams's children?" she asked, as she handed them the empty baskets.

Eddie shook his head and Archie looked down at the floor.

"'Course not, Mrs. Sampson. He isn't old enough to have children that age."

"How'd you come to know so much about his age, Em?"

The young girl blushed and disappeared into the dining-room.

The cook looked curiously at the boys. "You're some relation of Mr. Williams, ain't you?" she said. "I'm sure you don't live round here."

There was no answer. "Is he your brother?" persisted Mrs. Sampson.

Eddie shook his head.

"Your uncle?"



## IMPROVEMENTS

The boy nodded.

"Well, I thought so. How long are you goin' to stay here?"

"I don't know," whispered Eddie.

"Where'd you come from?"

No answer.

"Come, speak up, boy," said the cook, impatiently, turning to Archie. "You look as though you could talk. Why don't you answer?"

Archie stared at her with his bright brown eyes and said not a word.

"I never see such children," said the cook, crossly. "They must be awfully bashful, or else plumb idiots. But I guess you've got teeth if you hain't got tongues. Here, take these and clear out of the kitchen."

The boys accepted from her hand some big, sugar-coated cookies and passed out to the street.

"I suppose the stores are over there," said Eddie, pointing to a row of shops with various articles displayed in the windows. They turned in that direction, munching their cakes as they slowly walked along looking at the signs to find the one they were in search of.

"Look, Archie, there's my watch!" said Eddie, pointing to a jeweller's window.

"Are you sure?" asked Archie, examining an old heirloom hanging with others of its kind on a string which festooned the large pane.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

“Of course I am. Somebody must have picked it up and brought it here to sell. I wonder if the man will let me have it.”

Eddie was much excited and started toward the door. But Archie stopped him, saying: “You know we mustn’t talk to any one; but I think Uncle Weary will get it for you as soon as we tell him. You know he was real sorry when it was gone.”

Eddie was much comforted, and the boys bought their groceries as quickly as possible in order to hurry home. In a short time the coffee and sugar were lying in neat parcels in the baskets, and, calling Jip, they hurried through the village and climbed the mountain road to the clearing in much less time than it had taken to reach the hotel.



## CHAPTER VIII

### ELLERY'S MOTHER

THE children told Uncle Weary about Eddie's watch at once. "You'll get it, won't you?" said the little boy, imploringly.

"Shucks! You don't want that old tin ticker. It isn't worth ten cents, and I suppose the store-keeper would ask as much as a dollar for it," drawled the young man.

"Uncle Weary, I'll get up at four o'clock every morning. I'll pick twice as many berries as I do now, if you'll only buy my watch for me."

"If you're as smart as that you can buy a new one sometime. You don't want that old thing. Come to your supper now."

Eddie dared not cry, though it was hard to keep the tears back, and after supper went mournfully to his tasks of feeding Jip and Staggers, the chickens and rabbits, washing the dishes, and getting fire-wood for the next day. He was generally so cheerful and happy when



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doing these things that every one, even the animals, felt his silence and low spirits.

Archie was sympathetic and resented Uncle Weary's hardness. "I think he's a mean, old, stingy thing," he whispered, after the boys had gone to bed. But Eddie said nothing, and began crying softly in the darkness.

They were left alone very often at night, while their guardian went to the village. Archie had always been brave about it, and Eddie was getting over his terrors somewhat, though he still imagined bears in the dark woods about them. But he was so tired to-night that he soon cried himself to sleep, while Uncle Weary rode off on Staggers, who was now able to carry him at a slow gait.

When the boys woke in the morning the first thing their eyes fell on was Eddie's watch dangling from the limb of a tree near them. The little boy gave a whoop of delight and ran for his treasure, and then, hugging it to his breast, began crying for joy.

"Boo-hoo!" said Uncle Weary's mocking voice from his bed, where he had been watching the boys. "Archie, you go and get a cloth and mop up that boy. He's just one puddle of tears. He cries when he's glad and he cries when he's sorry."

"Oh, Uncle Weary! How good you are!" said Eddie, laughing and crying together.



## ELLERY'S MOTHER

"Good! What for? What have I done so awfully good?"

"Why, you got my watch for me last night."

"Didn't I tell you that old thing wasn't worth anything, and you'd better wait till you could get a new one? I don't see who was foolish enough to bring it back. It must have been ghosts."

"Oh, Eddie, it *was* Uncle Weary. He's just trying to fool you. I'm sorry I said he was stingy," said Archie.

"I know it! I know it! It's just like Uncle Weary to pretend he's cross when he's just as kind as can be. Oh, I'm so glad I've got my dear old watch again!"

Uncle Weary lay on his back, with his feet sticking out beyond the blanket which covered him, while his head rested on his clasped hands. Eddie crept up and dropped a soft kiss on one bare foot.

It was the nearest approach to a caress he had ever ventured upon, and he now jumped back very much frightened when the young man sprang up with a loud exclamation and began beating the ground with a stick.

"Something bit me! I think it must have been a snake. Kill him! Kill him!" he called, in an excited tone.

The boys laughed at his antics, but Uncle Weary kept a sober face and began to put on his



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shoes and stockings. "Won't do to go barefooted when there's snakes around," he said. "I thought they were all gone, but it seems there's some around yet."

"Uncle Weary, won't you carry my watch for me again?" said Eddie. "I'm afraid I'll lose it."

"Not much, young man. You look after your own jewelry after this. You better hang your watch in the cave. It can't fall out of holes in pockets then."

They were very gay at breakfast, Uncle Weary joking and the boys laughing more than usual, so that they were a little late when the meal was finished.

Uncle Weary looked at his watch as he rose from the table, and exclaimed: "Good gracious! We've been fooling away our time at a great rate, and we must hustle to-day. I've a lot of business on hand, and I want you boys to carry the fish and berries to the hotel. When you get back perhaps I'll have another surprise ready for you."

He put on his hat and was gone, after telling them he might not be home until evening.

The day passed quickly, although a very busy one. They washed the dishes, fed the animals, and then, after picking their berries, they played several hours, and about four o'clock they started



## ELLERY'S MOTHER

off for the village. The day was warm, and their faces were shining with perspiration from heat and exercise as they appeared at the kitchen door of the hotel. The rosy-cheeked girl seemed to be looking for them, and stepped out to take their baskets.

A fretful voice behind her called out, "Is that them dumb young ones with the berries, Em?"

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson. They've got a nice lot to-day."

"Lucky for us they have. We'll need all we can get with such scads of 'mobile people pilin' in. Hungriest critters on earth."

Em had her hand on the latch when the cook spoke again, warningly. "Don't open the screen more'n you can help. We're eaten up with flies already. I don't see the use of the young ones tracking in, anyway. Can't you bring the berries in and get the money an' tell 'em to go?"

"All right, Mrs. Sampson," said the girl, cheerfully. "You sit down here in the shade till I get back," she said to the children, pointing to a clean bench by the side of the house.

There is always running-water near at hand in a mountain region. The boys discovered a pipe by their seat which brought cold water from a spring and emptied it into a large stone basin. They drank and felt much refreshed, when the



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

pretty girl came back with some money in her hand. As she reached the door the cook called: "Here, come back, Em, and get some doughnuts for them kids. I never saw one that couldn't eat at all hours of the day or night." The girl laughed but went back, and presently returned with a paper bag, which she put in Eddie's hand.

"Eat 'em on the way home," she said, smiling. "I guess you better start pretty soon. You've quite a way to walk, haven't you?"

"Uncle Weary says it's a mile and a half from the cave to the village," said Eddie, as they walked toward the gate.

The young woman went with them until they were beyond the hearing of Mrs. Sampson. "What a funny name for your uncle! I thought it was Williams," she said.

Eddie opened his mouth to answer, but, remembering that he must not talk more than was necessary, remained silent, and Archie looked on the ground.

"I expect he makes you call him Uncle Weary for fun," said the young girl, laughing. "It's just like him. He's always joking. Is he at home to-day?" she went on, shyly.

"No, he said he had to go off somewhere on business," said Eddie.

"Did he take the horse?"



## ELLERY'S MOTHER

"Yes, he rides Staggers now all the time."

"Is that the name of your horse? How funny!" giggled the girl.

"Em!" called the cook, crossly.

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson. I'm coming. Now you must go," she said, hastily, to the children, and, turning her back toward the kitchen door, slipped a little note into Archie's pocket. "I wish you'd give that to your uncle," she whispered. "Don't let anybody see it, will you?" And, blushing and laughing, she ran back to the kitchen.

As the children reached the front of the hotel they stood for a moment to look at its shining whiteness, which seemed to glisten more than usual in contrast to the little strip of perfectly kept green lawn close to the house. Just then a large touring automobile came dashing up, and stopped before the hotel chugging and thumping ferociously. A chauffeur in goggles sat on the front seat with a gentleman in a long dust-coat, who immediately jumped out and disappeared into the office.

Two ladies on the back seat lifted their veils and looked around. "What a pretty spot!" said the elder one. "And how nice and New-Englandy the hotel looks. I hope Allen will find they can take us in. I believe you would like it here, dear."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

The young woman at her side was gazing at the children. "Mother," she said, in an excited whisper, "look at that little boy! Isn't he the very image of Ellery?"

"He's a sweet little fellow. And—yes, he does look a good deal like Ellery. But try to be calm, Edith. You know you must control yourself."

"I'm trying, mother," said the daughter, in a stifled tone. "But I want to talk to him."

"Won't you come nearer, children?" said the elderly woman, in a sweet voice.

As they came up to the automobile the one who had been called Edith fixed her eyes on Eddie's face and said, hurriedly: "I want to know your name very much, little boy. You don't mind telling me, do you?"

"Eddie," said the boy, looking up, shyly.

"Isn't that strange!" said the mother, "to have your father's name and look enough like you to be your child!"

"Do you live here?" still questioned Edith.

Eddie shook his head.

"Won't you tell me where your home is?"

No reply.

"Are you this boy's brother?" asked the elder woman of Archie.

The boy did not even shake his head, but looked down the road and kicked the dust with his bare foot.



## ELLERY'S MOTHER

"What shy creatures!" commented the lady. "There's no use asking any more questions. But I'm sure they're not brothers. The dark one looks like an Italian child. I presume he is one. You know, there are hundreds of them in New England. He doesn't understand a word we say."

Just then the tall gentleman came back and said, cheerfully: "It's all right. They're pretty crowded, but they'll take us in for a week, anyway."

"I hope you didn't engage rooms until I could examine the beds, Allen," said the elderly lady, anxiously.

"It's all right, mother. Don't you worry about the beds," said the young man, laughing. "Come in and see how nice everything is. It's the best place we've struck yet."

The mother stepped rather stiffly to the ground, with his assistance, and then, holding out his arms to the other lady, he said, tenderly, "Come, dearest."

She seemed to be very weak and frail, for he almost carried her to the piazza; but before they could enter the house she turned to her husband and said, "Allen, dear, I want to kiss that little boy."

The gentleman immediately called and whistled to the children, who were walking down



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

the street. They looked back, and when he beckoned them to return they did so wonderingly.

Eddie was led to the chair of the invalid, who put her thin arms round him and kissed his tanned cheek. "You are like my little boy, but he is dead," she murmured.

Her eyes were dry, but Eddie began to weep, and throwing his arms around her neck whispered, "My pa and ma are dead, too."

They hurried the child away and took the young woman to her room. Then the boys started at a brisk pace, for the shadows showed they were later than usual.

They reached the clearing about dark and found Uncle Weary waiting for them, with a nice supper all ready.

He made no comments when they told him of the automobile incident, and read his little note from Em with a pleased smile.

"You don't say anything about my surprise," he said, after supper, as he sat on a log and smoked his pipe.

"Oh yes, we forgot that," said Archie. "You give us so many surprises we can't keep track of them."

"Where is it?" asked Eddie, peering into the cave, which had begun to grow dark.

"Well, I never saw such blind little bats!"



## ELLERY'S MOTHER

drawled the young man. "If 'twas a bear 'twould bite you."

"Oh, I see it!" exclaimed Eddie, spying some wheels down by the spring. "Uncle Weary's got a wagon!"



## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

THE boys ran to the spring, Uncle Weary following leisurely, and found an old light "express" wagon with two of its wheels standing in the water, evidently for the purpose of making the wood swell so that the tires would stay on.

Eddie began a critical examination. "Where did you get it, Uncle Weary?" he asked.

"At the wagon store, of course. You didn't think I made it, did you?"

"But it's so old. I should think it would fall to pieces."

"I guess it's as new as Staggers. I can fix it up so's it 'll go all right. But you needn't ride in it if you think it isn't good enough."

"Oh, I think it's all right. I know you'll make a nice wagon of it," Eddie hastened to say, fearing he had hurt Uncle Weary's feelings.

"Have you got a harness?" asked Archie.

"Shall have when I make it," said the young





“ONE OF THEM RUBBED, WHILE THE OTHER PAINTED”







## AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

man, taking some straps and ropes from the wagon.

The next day he was up early, and the boys found him busily sewing bits of leather with a large needle and some twine. "Get breakfast right off, kids!" he called. "I want you should hustle this morning. Pick your berries as soon as you can and catch your fish, and perhaps I'll let you paint the wagon."

The children were delighted with this prospect, and worked faster than usual at their tasks, so that early in the afternoon they were ready for the new fun. Uncle Weary had been tinkering with the wagon, nailing pieces of board on the broken floor, tightening a loose spoke in one wheel, and adding new screws where they were needed.

The boys were told how to stir the brown paint thoroughly with a stick, and then put it on evenly with a brush. One of them rubbed the wood with sand-paper, while the other painted, taking turns at each occupation until their backs and arms ached and the perspiration rolled down their faces.

Uncle Weary had dressed with unusual care that afternoon, to take the berries and fish to the hotel. He wore a new outing-shirt, with a bright-blue necktie. His old light-colored trousers he had dyed with the same brown which had trans-



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formed Archie and Staggers, and had pressed them so carefully they looked quite new. He had on a pair of new tan shoes and a fresh straw hat, and looked altogether very handsome and stylish, the boys thought, as he came toward them to give his last orders.

"Pretty good painters!" he said, approvingly. "Keep at it till you get it done, and then you may clean up and meet me at the foot of the mountain by the watering-trough. I'll have a lot of things, and I shall want you to help me carry them."

The novelty of the painting had worn off, and they were tired and stiff, and glad to have it done by the time the last old spoke was finished. They washed their hands with the yellow soap, and carefully brushed and combed their hair and put on clean shirts and trousers, and started out about five o'clock, with Jip, to meet Uncle Weary.

Perhaps half an hour before they reached the watering-trough the large touring-car which they had seen arrive at the hotel the day before came up to it and stopped.

"I'm afraid we'll have to stay here while I tinker up the machine a bit, sir, if you don't mind," said the chauffeur, touching his cap to the gentleman by his side.

"How long will it take, James?"



## AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

"The matter of a quarter of an hour or so, I should think."

There was a grassy space under some trees opposite the watering-trough, and Mr. Taggart, noticing this, turned to the ladies on the back seat and said: "What do you say to sitting over there in the shade until the repairing is done?"

"That would be delightful, wouldn't it, dear?" answered the elder woman. "You might spread a dust-robe and Edith could lie down and rest."

Her daughter assented with a faint smile, and the husband carried his wife across the dusty road and laid her on the grass in the shadow of a big tree. The chauffeur brought out his tools and began, in a very business-like way, to repair the automobile, and Mr. Taggart returned to watch the operation, and to assist wherever possible.

Mrs. Taggart looked up into the branches of the tree above her, and her mother, sitting by her side, began chatting cheerfully. "I've been exploring this morning. You know, I don't sleep very well after daylight, and I've discovered all sorts of interesting people."

"You always find them in out-of-the-way places in New England," said Mrs. Taggart. "And they usually know the history of everybody in the country round them. I wonder if



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we couldn't find out something about little Eddie."

"I've already done that. I had a talk with Mrs. Sampson, the cook. She's a ferocious creature, but if you get on the right side of her she is kind and friendly."

"You did that, of course, mother; but do tell me what she said about Eddie."

"Well, it seems those children are in Melton with their uncle just for the berry season. They are camping on the mountain not far from here, and bring in a good many berries every day. The cook says she has her doubts about the man being really related to them, though Eddie may be. He is a queer genius, always joking. They think in the village he is good company, and they like him; but they can't find out much about him."

"I wonder if he is always good to the children."

"Mrs. Sampson thinks he is. She has not seen them very often; they have been to the village only a few times, but they are always clean and seem well-fed and cared for. And she believes the fair little boy is very fond of his uncle."

"I wonder how she found that out," said Edith. "They seemed as shy as wild birds when we tried to talk to them last night. But I suppose they are more at ease with the cook."



## AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

"No, she seemed very much provoked to find them so shy. She says the dark boy is either deaf and dumb or a foreigner, she can't make out which. He looks very bright and intelligent, but seems not to understand a word that is said. The other one does all the talking, but that is not much. Mrs. Sampson says she never saw such a bashful little creature."

"You are a shrewd guesser, mother. You said you thought the dark boy was an Italian."

"Yes, but any one could tell that from his looks. The cook asked the young man—his name is Williams, I believe—if he was Italian. Williams made some joking reply, but he didn't deny it. He probably pays the parents a few pennies for a day's work, and makes a good thing out of it. They do that a great deal around here, the cook says. There are a lot of Italian workmen in the quarries, and they are always glad to have their children with Americans to learn English."

"But little Eddie! Poor, sweet little Eddie, with no father or mother, wandering about homeless, while our home—"

"Don't cry, my darling," said the mother, anxiously; "you know it weakens you so much, and you have no strength to spare. I know, my dear child, how desolate your life is with your little boy gone out of it, but try to realize that you



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

have others to live for. What would Allen and your poor old mother do without you?"

"I know, I know. I will try, mother dear," said Edith, wiping her tears away.

"We know at least that our precious Ellery is safe and at rest. The poor Stebbinses have not that consolation."

"The Stebbinses! Who are they?" said Edith.

"Don't you remember those people from Rochester that we met in England last summer? They were travelling for the health of their delicate little boy."

"Oh yes. I recall them now," said Edith. "You speak as though something dreadful had happened to them."

"You may be your own judge of that. I met Mrs. Roberts at the hotel here yesterday. She knows the Stebbinses very well. She says there seems to be a mystery in their family, and thinks their boy has disappeared."

"Oh, the poor mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Taggart, sitting up and clasping her hands.

"Mrs. Roberts says she thinks Mrs. Stebbins doesn't know, and imagines that the boy is in a sanitarium."

"But aren't they trying to find him? I would think the whole country would be up in arms, and that the papers would be full of it."



## AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

"Mrs. Roberts says her husband is sure he saw a detective walking with Mr. Stebbins one day in London. He will not talk to any one about his loss, except to say that he does not want it to get into the papers. That's probably on his wife's account, and because there is more chance of tracking the child by keeping quiet. You know they never found Charlie Ross. Many people think it is because the detectives were hampered by the notoriety the newspapers gave the case."

"Oh, I hope they'll find the little fellow," said Mrs. Taggart, fervently, "and that the poor mother won't know he has been lost until she has him in her arms again."

"I'm sure they'll get him," said Mrs. Ellery, cheerfully. "Mrs. Roberts says Mr. Stebbins is a millionaire, and the kidnappers are after money, so it's probably only a question of a short time before he is returned safe and sound."

Mrs. Ellery had gossiped at length, because she saw her daughter seemed to feel an interest in the life about her for the first time since the death of her only child, a year before. She had listened and asked questions. It was a sign that she was coming slowly out of her morbid condition, which made her anxious mother very happy. Edith closed her eyes as though tired,



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

and Mrs. Ellery, turning her head, exclaimed: "There are those children now! Talk about angels!"

Archie and Eddie had arrived at the watering-trough, and were absorbed in watching the repairing of the automobile. "Please ask little Eddie to come here, mother," said the young woman, in a low voice.

Her mother crossed the road and, taking Eddie's hand, said kindly: "Won't you go to the lady under the tree? She would like to talk with you."

The child silently assented, and was soon seated on the grass, with the arms of the gentle invalid about him. She pressed a kiss on his yellow curls, and said, abruptly: "Is your uncle kind to you, dear?"

"Yes, indeed!" said the child, eagerly. "He's awfully good. I love him better than anybody in the world."

"You told me your father and mother are dead. Do you always live with your uncle?"

Eddie blushed and hung his head. "He says I mustn't talk about myself to strangers," he answered, in a whisper.

"Your uncle is right, dear. It was rude of me to ask questions. We will talk about something else. Should you like to hear about my little boy who looked so much like you?"



## AT THE WATERING-TROUGH

The child nodded shyly, and Ellery's mother, holding the roughened, brown hand of the little wanderer, spoke freely for the first time of her lost child. They were both so absorbed they did not see Uncle Weary arrive at the trough. He stood there and talked some time with Mr. Taggart about the roads in the vicinity, and then, with the silent Archie by his side, he strolled over to the pair under the tree and looked down at them quizzically.

"Oh, Mr. Williams," said Edith, looking up, "won't you loan this little boy to me sometimes while we are here? You see, we are great friends."

"Well, I don't know as I can spare him very often. We're pretty busy nowadays making our living."

"Yes, I know, and he is so fond of you he wouldn't stay away very long; but if you would let me take him for a ride now and then he would enjoy it, and it would make me very happy."

"I guess there'd be no objection, if he wants to go."

"Oh, thank you so much! And would the other little boy enjoy a ride, too?" she added, glancing at Archie, whose eyes were fixed on the automobile.

"I guess one is enough. I don't believe this kid wants to go very much."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Perhaps he's afraid of an automobile. If he is, there certainly wouldn't be much pleasure in riding in one. Thank you very much for letting Eddie go," assented the young woman, rising with the assistance of her husband.

"I am afraid you are very tired, dear," said Mr. Taggart, anxiously, folding her wrap around her thin form. "James was a long time repairing the car."

"No, indeed, Allen. On the contrary, I have not felt so well and happy for a long time. I have been making the acquaintance of this dear little boy. His uncle says he may ride with us sometimes."

"That's good. I'm very glad," said her husband, heartily. "We usually pass here every evening about five, and will be glad to pick him up for a turn any time, at that hour," he continued, turning to Uncle Weary.

"All right. He'll be there as often as you'll want him, I guess."

Uncle Weary picked up the baskets and, calling to the boys to follow, started up the road. Mr. Taggart stopped him to say: "Here is my card, Mr. Williams. I know your name, but I believe you don't know mine."

"One more kiss, dear," said Mrs. Taggart, leaning over the cushioned seat, and Eddie, reaching up, put his arms around her neck



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and gave her a fervent hug. "Remember, five o'clock," she whispered.

The car started, and so long as he could see she waved a thin, white hand toward him.

Uncle Weary gave each one a package to carry, and then strode on, leaving them to follow with Jip.

"I wish he wouldn't talk so about me to those folks," said Archie, discontentedly.

"He has a good reason for it, I suppose," said Eddie. "I wish he'd let you ride in the automobile with me. She asked you to, you know."

"Oh, I don't care about that. I'm tired of autos. We have three at home, and I hardly ever ride in one. I like my pony better."

"Do you have a hired man to run your automobile?" asked Eddie.

"Yes, of course. He's a Frenchman, and he's awful cross."

"I should think it would be fine to have automobiles and horses and a home and father and mother," said Eddie, wistfully.

"Everybody has those," said Archie, carelessly.

"I suppose Uncle Weary will take us home before long," suggested Eddie.

"I hope not. I want to stay as long as I can," said Archie. "It's lots more fun here than at Aunt Kate's."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

“Uncle Weary’s awfully good, isn’t he?” asked Eddie.

“He’s all right if he would let me talk. I hate to have folks think me deaf and dumb.”

“But he has a good reason for that, I’m sure, and he didn’t make you stay a girl, you know.”



## CHAPTER X

### A VISITOR

THE raspberries were all gone, and the boys were sent farther up the mountain every day to pick huckleberries. The morning air was often quite chilly, and they used to run through the woods to the huckleberry-patch to get warm. But they were so toughened by this time that exposure to cold never seemed to harm them, and all weather brought its own enjoyment.

They always had Jip with them. The little dog loved the water, and soon learned a number of astonishing feats which the children called his "water tricks." One of them was very difficult, and the boys were a long time in teaching it to him. They would swim side by side and close together. Jip would stand on their backs, facing their heads, and hold in his teeth a string, which the boys also had in their mouths, like reins. Another funny trick of the dog was to sit in a cask and float it round the pool, holding a stick in his mouth to keep his balance.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

Every moment they were awake was taken up with active work or play, and in the long rainy days which sometimes kept them many hours in the cave they popped corn, played checkers, or taught Jip new tricks. Their guardian also made them learn to sew. Archie didn't like this at all. It was girl's work, and he felt degraded by it; but he never thought of disobeying orders or even questioning them, so he sewed on his buttons and even put patches on his trousers under the direction of Uncle Weary, who could do almost anything with his needle.

The little boy became more reconciled to this work one day, however, when the young man told him that all soldiers and sailors had to sew, and if he ever went into the army, he would have to keep his clothes in order, so he might as well begin now.

Uncle Weary was also very busy. He always rose early, and usually spent the morning in baking, washing, ironing, mending, and keeping the cave as neat and orderly as a New England kitchen.

He had made several tables and stools of dry-goods boxes, and contrived a nice little pantry by fastening shelves into a crevice in the rocky wall of the cave. He had brought home one day a small old cook-stove, which he set up near the opening, so that the pipe would carry the



## A VISITOR

smoke up the side of the mountain. He had plenty of pots and pans and kettles, and these were kept, when not in use, in one of the big boxes used for a cupboard, with a neat curtain to hide them.

The cave had a very wide entrance; in fact, it was a big, shallow room, scooped out of the rocky mountain, with one side open to the weather. The young man had bought an old tent, from which he made a large awning, or curtain, which he fastened with big spikes over the opening. This was lowered when the rain came from the east, making the cave as cosey and snug as a room in a house.

He still insisted on sleeping out-of-doors except when it rained, and then they had only the hard benches for beds in the cave. One day Uncle Weary brought home a load of straw on the little brown wagon, and after that they had soft, snug nests to burrow in, which the boys thought delightful on chilly nights. To complete their comfortable and home-like surroundings, they always had a camp-fire a short distance from the cave, to keep off the mosquitoes and to sit by when it was damp and cool.

Mrs. Sampson had given Uncle Weary a little blue suit which one of the summer boarders left in her room in the hotel. It fitted Eddie very well, and, dressed in this and in a new straw hat,



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

he stood by the trough one day not long after the promise had been given to Mrs. Taggart. He was waiting for the automobile, which in a few moments came chugging up to him. Mrs. Taggart reached out her arms with a joyful cry when she saw the boy, and Mr. Taggart placed him between the two ladies.

He was soon quite at ease, and, as he was not required to talk much, he felt happy and contented as he was whirled over the smooth road, his hand in the gloved palm of his new friend, and his bare legs and feet covered by soft, scented draperies.

When he reached home he carried a box of candy and a mechanical toy. Uncle Weary laughed when the boy showed him his presents, as he said: "If you don't look out, you'll be a baby again, with your candy and your toys."

Eddie laughed, too, and stowed away the obnoxious gifts with his other treasures in a corner of the cave which belonged particularly to him.

He then passed round the candy. Uncle Weary picked out a fat chocolate-drop, and, putting it in his mouth, said, in his slow drawl: "Pretty good stuff. I wouldn't mind being teacher's pet myself, if that's what you get by it."

Archie had not tasted candy for a long time. It had been prohibited, along with other good



## A VISITOR

things; but he had now the chance to eat whatever came his way, and helped himself liberally to the delicious sweets.

Eddie also ate all the candy he wanted for the first time in his life, and, when Jip had come in for his share, the large box was entirely emptied. Uncle Weary put it away for future use, and then said: "The lady tried to find out something about us, didn't she?"

"No, she hardly asked any questions at all. She just told me stories about her little boy that died."

"Did she ask you to visit her?"

"She said she wondered if you would be willing to let me go to see her next winter."

"What did you say?"

"I told her I'd have to go to school in Summit when I went home."

Uncle Weary said no more, and smoked his pipe in a brown-study, while the boys went through their usual routine before going to bed.

In the afternoon of the next day the children were returning from fishing, and had reached the watering-trough, when they heard wheels behind them, and, turning, saw Uncle Weary driving up with Staggers. He was dressed very neatly, as usual, and by his side sat Em in a white dress and a new straw hat with pink roses. The young



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

man's auburn hair was cut close to his head. He had shaved off his mustache and wore slightly colored glasses, making his blue eyes look almost brown. He had a straight, well-shaped nose and thin lips, and looked altogether like a college professor taking his vacation.

Em's pretty hat was very becoming over her curly, black hair. Her eyes were dark and sparkling, her skin pink and white, and she had fine, even teeth and dimples in her cheeks. They were both talking and laughing so busily that they did not see the children until they were almost upon them. Then Uncle Weary pulled up the old horse and called out: "Hullo! Didn't expect to see you here."

Em smiled and blushed and said something in a low tone to her companion, who answered: "All right. Put your fish in the wagon, boys, and walk along ahead of us. Build a fire and fill the tea-kettle. We'll be there before long."

The boys ran on, and when the elders reached the cave a blue smoke was rising from the stove-pipe. Eddie had started a fire, and the tea-kettle with fresh water was on the stove.

The young man drove into the clearing, and Em jumped lightly to the ground. She laughed as she came toward the boys, and sat down on the clean bench one of them moved toward her. She then took off her hat and brushed the mos-



## A VISITOR

quitoes away, as she looked around the neat room and watched the boys set the table.

Presently Uncle Weary came in with some packages of groceries in his hands, and asked her what she thought of his housekeeping.

"Pretty good for a man," she said, showing her dimples, "but I'd like to see the kind of cook you are."

"Oh, Uncle Weary's an awful good cook; you ought to stay to supper and see," said Eddie.

"That's what she's going to do, sonny," said the young man. "Now you and Archie put your best foot foremost, and show her that men folks can keep house as well as anybody."

"Gracious! I mustn't stay to supper," said Em, rising. "It 'll make me late, and I promised Mrs. Sampson I'd be at home for dinner at seven o'clock to wait on table."

"Oh yes, you can," said Uncle Weary, coaxingly. "We'll have supper in next to no time. I'll get you home all right. Don't you worry."

Em hesitated a moment, and then sat down, saying: "Well, all right. If you're sure about that, I'll stay."

They all flew about and soon had an abundant meal ready. They had one table-cloth for grand occasions, which was brought out now, and a paper napkin placed at her plate. Archie got the butter and milk from the spring. Eddie



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

brought out some doughnuts and cold fried rabbit from the pantry, while Uncle Weary cut the bread, made the tea, and washed the huckleberries.

Em was rather embarrassed when she took her seat at the table, but she was soon over that, and laughed as heartily as any one at Uncle Weary's droll remarks.

The little boys were delighted to have the pretty girl with them. Eddie sat as near her as he could, and smiled every time she looked at him, and Archie passed her everything at least three times.

She was anxious to start back as soon as supper was over, and told Uncle Weary she would certainly walk home if he didn't hurry up with that horse. The young man started at once to get ready, and while she was waiting the boys took their visitor round the little plantation to show her all their possessions. She seemed much pleased and interested in everything, and gave them some good advice about feeding the rabbits, which so won Eddie's heart that he said, as she pinned on her hat: "Oh, I wish you'd stay with us all the time. Can't you?"

"The idea!" she exclaimed, laughing and blushing as she pinched his cheek.

She didn't kiss the boys or even shake hands with them, but they knew she was friendly and





"LAUGHING AS SHE PINCHED HIS CHEEK"







## A VISITOR

kind, and, as she drove away, looking back over her shoulder and laughing at them, they felt rather lonesome, and went about their tasks of washing dishes and putting things in order for the night with sober faces and without their usual chatter.

“I think it would be awful nice if Em would come and live with us, don’t you?” said Eddie.

“Yes. I like her first-rate. I don’t believe she’d scold, and she’d mind her own business and let us fellows alone,” said Archie, heartily.

Eddie was silent for a moment, and then remarked, “But I think she’d make Uncle Weary mind, don’t you?”

Archie laughed and said: “Yes, of course. She’d be the boss.”

“She made him bring home our fish in the wagon,” continued Eddie. “He never did that before, and he had to get the horse before he wanted to. Isn’t it funny! We make Jip mind, Uncle Weary makes us mind, and Em makes him mind.”



## CHAPTER XI

### UNCLE SAM

ONE morning the little boys were wakened from a sound sleep by a loud noise. It sounded to them like three or four revolver-shots fired in rapid succession. They were very much startled, and ran toward the den as fast as their legs could carry them, to see what was the matter.

There was little light in the clearing at this hour, as the tall pines shut out the early sunlight, so that they saw dimly a tall figure standing by a tree about two yards beyond the entrance to the den. He looked very familiar, yet the boys could not remember where they had seen him before. He was dressed in striped trousers, a long-tailed coat, and a high white hat. His nose was long and pointed, his cheeks were red, and there was a small tuft of straw-colored hair on his chin. He was smiling, so the boys thought he must be friendly, and Archie walked on to get a better view of him. Eddie was a little afraid, and hung back, hiding behind a tree.



## UNCLE SAM

"Don't come any nearer, boy. I'm a dangerous character. You don't know what I may do to you," said the stranger, in a muffled tone.

Archie stopped. He felt almost sure a joke was being played, and he didn't want to be fooled. At the same time he might be mistaken. Perhaps the stranger was one of Uncle Weary's friends.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the man. "You're a great American boy. Don't you know your Uncle Sam?"

"Come on, Eddie," said Archie, "it's Uncle Weary dressed up."

"Bring me my cap, my head's cold in this white hat," said the same queer voice.

The boys ran into the den, and there sat Uncle Weary peeling potatoes and looking very innocent. "Why, what made you get up so early?" he said, seeming to be very much surprised.

The boys looked at him and then at the strange man outside, and ran out laughing. The mystery was solved. Uncle Weary had made a "dummy" which had fooled them completely.

"But how could he talk?" asked Eddie, examining the image carefully.

"Didn't you know that I'm a ventriloquist?"

"I don't know what that is," said the boy.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Oh, I know," Archie exclaimed. "It's somebody talking down in his throat and you think it's somebody else. I've heard 'em lots of times."

"Oh, ain't it wonderful," said Eddie. "Why, I thought it was a real man talking."

"Why did you make Uncle Sam, and what was that noise we heard?" asked Archie.

"You're patriotic youngsters. Look round and see."

An American flag hung over the entrance to the den, and many little ones were stuck into cracks in the hen-house, the squirrel's cage, and Stagger's tent, and a number of them were nailed to the trunks of trees. The whole clearing looked gay with the bright Stars and Strips.

"Oh, it's the 'Fourth,'" cried Archie, "and Uncle Weary was firing crackers!"

"You've hit the nail on the head this time," said Uncle Weary, much pleased at the success of his surprise. "How'd you like to celebrate to-day?"

"Do you mean with fire-crackers?" asked Archie, wistfully. "I'd like that ever so much; but my mother says she's afraid they'll hurt my eyes."

"Your eyes are well now. I guess she wouldn't care. Open that package."

The little fellow was too much excited to do



## UNCLE SAM

the task well. His fingers fumbled with the string, and Eddie finally untied it, opened the paper, and took out a dozen packs of fire-crackers, a bag of torpedoes, and two pasteboard masks, or false faces, with large noses and grinning mouths. The fire-crackers were pounced upon with true Fourth-of-July ardor, and Eddie at once lighted the punk and began to teach Archie how to use it. They fired off one pack before breakfast, and after that meal Uncle Weary said: "Now, you do the chores and pick berries for an hour or so. By that time I'll be back with a boy to help us out. We have to furnish the hotel an extra lot of fruit to-day. We'll be through early, and then we'll celebrate some more."

"Who is the boy?" asked Archie.

"Do you remember the fellow that brought us to the street-cars in his wagon? Well, he's the one. He's Mr. Thompson's hired boy. He's going to help us with the berries off and on, while the rush is on at the hotel."

"Oh, I remember him," said Eddie. "His name's Wag, isn't it? I liked him ever so much. May he play with us some?"

"Maybe. I'll see first how smart he is to work," said Uncle Weary, putting Staggers into the shafts of the little wagon.

"May we fire some more crackers?" asked Archie.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Of course. What are they for? Didn't you know the government makes you pay a fine for every cracker left over to the 5th?"

Eddie laughed as usual when Uncle Weary joked, and Archie asked: "Can we make a fort with 'em? My cousin Tom always does that with his crackers."

"I don't care what you do with 'em," said the young man, picking up the lines to drive off. "But you'd better not fire any while I'm gone. Of course, you'll blow off some of your fingers and toes, and I must be here to sew 'em on again."

When he was gone the boys talked and planned while they worked. Eddie knew a number of fancy ways of firing crackers, which he promised to teach Archie. But the fort was the most interesting part of their programme. They had a long discussion about its shape and size and the place where they would build it, so that the hour slipped away faster than they expected.

Uncle Weary came back with Wag about ten o'clock, and also with several mysterious packages in the back of the wagon.

"That looks like a cannon. Is it one?" said Archie, pointing to a tall, round object covered with a piece of burlap. "And may we fire it off?"

"You're the most blood-thirsty boy I ever saw," said Uncle Weary, as he began to unhar-





"FORT-BUILDING BY THE SPRING"







## UNCLE SAM

ness the horse. "Can't you make noise enough without a cannon?"

"Oh, it is one," laughed Archie.

"Well, whatever it is, it won't go off yet awhile. Perhaps, if you're a good boy, I'll let you help fire it."

"Do you use matches or punk for a cannon?" asked Archie.

"Wait and see. You'd better go to work on your crackers now, or you won't get through with them to-day."

The children darted off to the spring to build their fort, and Wag, who had been grinning steadily, began picking berries, and Uncle Weary took his packages into the cave after saying to the new-comer, "If you're smart and get enough berries by two o'clock, you may quit and play with the boys."

Wag seemed to be overcome with astonishment. He gazed at Uncle Weary with open mouth as though he could not believe his ears. His face grew red under his freckles as he mumbled, "I kin do that easy; I'm a master-picker."

"All right, let's see you do it," said the young man, as the boy disappeared in the bushes.

The sand by the spring proved to be suitable for fort-building. It was just damp enough to pack solidly around an old bucket. Archie had seen real forts, and Eddie had looked at pictures



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

of them, so they knew pretty well how to go to work. Archie brought the sand in a pan, and Eddie covered the bucket entirely several inches thick, smoothing the surface carefully. Then they stuck fire-crackers into holes made about two inches apart and put a little flag on top.

"It looks just like Fort Hamilton," said Archie, "only it's not the same color."

"Ain't it pretty!" cried Eddie. "I hate to light the crackers. They'll blow it all to pieces."

But Archie said that was what forts were for, and ran to get the punk. They called Uncle Weary to come and look at the fort and see the guns go off, and Eddie asked if Wag might come, too.

"Yes, I guess he can spend the time for that; but he's in an awful hurry to get his stint done."

Eddie soon brought back the farmer's boy, who grinned approval; Uncle Weary said it was a pretty good fort for the first one; Jip barked appreciatively; so the crackers were lighted, and all went off with a great noise and tumbled the sand in heaps about the bucket. The boys felt well paid for their labor, and began building another fort at once. By the time that was finished and destroyed they were called to dinner, which was more than usually good and abundant. Uncle Weary said: "You can't be patriotic on the Fourth unless you have an extra fine dinner."



## UNCLE SAM

He piled the plates of the hungry boys with fried chicken, plenty of gravy, and mashed potatoes and celery, and for dessert they had the usual pie and doughnuts.

Jip and all the other animals were treated to a Fourth-of-July dinner, and then Uncle Weary said: "Now I'll help with the berries while you wash the dishes. Then I'll take the berries and fish to the hotel, and Wag may play with you till I come back. You can stay till milking-time, can't you, Wag?"

"Yes," said the boy, eagerly, "I don't have to get back till most sunset."

Wag had worked astonishingly fast. He had gathered almost the required amount of fruit, so that by the time the dishes were washed Uncle Weary was ready to go to the village, and Wag was free and eager to share in the celebration.

"Boys, you must do just as Wag tells you," said Uncle Weary. "He's a good deal older than you and ought to know more about things. If he shows good sense and don't get you into mischief I'll let him play with you again, perhaps."

"May we fire off all the crackers?" asked Archie.

"I don't care what you do with your own property, and Wag is old enough to see that you



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

don't get into any trouble," said Uncle Weary, driving away.

The boys gave Wag a whole pack of crackers. He had never had more than a dozen in his life, and to be able to fire off twenty-five of them without stopping was unheard-of luxury. He looked very happy as he took them, but when Eddie gave him the punk he said, "I ought to gin ye somethin' for these."

"Oh no," Archie hastened to say. "We give them to you, of course."

"We've got lots of 'em," added Eddie.

"But I don't want to take things without payin' for them. Here's some liquorice Miss Thompson gin me for cleanin' out the hen-house. Will ye take two sticks for the crackers?"

"Why, no, Wag, 'course not." Eddie put his hands behind him so that he would not be tempted to take the sticky sweets of which he was so fond.

"All right," said the big boy, laying down the pack, "ye don't have to trade if ye don't want to. But I sha'n't take the crackers without payin' for 'em, and I hain't got any money to-day."

The children saw that Wag meant what he said, so they hastened to close the bargain and made him happy again. Archie tasted the liquorice but didn't like it, so Eddie took both



## UNCLE SAM

sticks, and made his hands and face black and smeary as he munched them, while Archie watched Wag's crackers explode. When they were all gone the little boy suggested that they fire a whole pack at once, as his cousin Tom did. Eddie thought this would be rather wasteful, but Wag settled the matter by proposing to fire half a pack at a time.

Eddie consented to this. The crackers were buried in a heap of sand which flew in every direction, and the exploding crackers made as much noise as any boy could wish. It sent Jip howling to the den. The Fourth was almost too much for his nerves. After the next grand explosion they fired the remaining crackers under logs and stones and tin cans until all were gone but one giant-cracker, which they saved for the last. After a good deal of consultation they decided to put it in Uncle Sam's mouth and light it. It blew the dummy to pieces, much to the satisfaction of Archie and Wag. But Eddie was tired of noise, and was glad that there were no more crackers left. They brought out the torpedoes and masks now; but the torpedoes seemed rather tame after the giant-cracker, and they decided to play "Indian" with the masks. Uncle Weary had told them they might do what they liked with the figure of Uncle Sam, so they pulled out the straw which stuffed the coat and trou-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

sers, and Wag put these garments on. The children threw a blanket over his shoulders and stuck some chicken wings in his hair. Eddie made him a tomahawk of pasteboard, and Archie tied on the reddest of the false faces. He certainly made a very good wild Indian as he ran shouting and whooping about the clearing. He captured the boys, who hid behind trees, and dragged them to the den, where he scalped them in the most approved style. It was the greatest fun possible to himself and Archie, but Eddie found the play a little too rough. He was not really afraid, but when Wag came toward him howling fiercely, with that horrible face on, it made him feel a little nervous, and he was glad when at last they were all tired and thirsty. The masks were thrown one side, and after a drink of cold water at the spring they settled down on the grass and made Jip perform some of his tricks.

“Why, there’s Uncle Weary!” exclaimed Archie, looking up. “I thought he had just gone.”

The exciting day had passed so swiftly they could not realize that it was almost over.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE CANNON

“**T**IME for supper, boys!” called Uncle Weary. “Archie may help me take care of the horse and Eddie start the fire.”

“I s’pose I’ve got to go now,” said Wag, beginning to look for his hat.

“No, I saw Mr. Thompson at the village. He told me you may stay two nights. His cousin’s going home with him to make a visit and will help with the milking. I want you bright and early mornings to pick berries. They’re asking for a lot at the hotel just now.”

This arrangement seemed almost too good to be true. Wag showed his appreciation by a wider grin than usual, and Eddie threw his arms about the big fellow, exclaiming, in his loving, impulsive fashion:

“Oh, I’m so glad, Wag! I wish you could stay with us always!”

“New broom sweeps clean,” said Uncle Weary. “Perhaps you wouldn’t like him so



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

well if you had him all the time. We'll see, now, how smart he is about house-work. You boys may get supper while I have a rest. This has been a pretty long day."

The farmer boy was as brisk and clever at one task as another. He cut the bread and pie very deftly, brought the water and butter from the spring, and set the table, while Eddie "warmed over" the potatoes and made the tea.

The meal was ready in half an hour, but the young man was still sleeping in his hammock under the trees.

"He must be awful tired," said Eddie. "He got up so early this morning and he's worked so hard all day."

"We'd better let him sleep," said Archie.

Eddie thought so, too, and put the potatoes in the oven to keep warm and set the teapot on the hearth.

They went to the spring to wait, and as they were tired they lay on the grass to rest, speaking in whispers so as not to disturb Uncle Weary, and in a moment all three were sound asleep.

The nap lasted until they were wakened by hearing a chuckling laugh. They opened their eyes, and there stood Uncle Weary, his hands in his pockets, looking down at them.

"Well, well!" he said, "American boys asleep



## THE CANNON

on the Fourth of July! Who ever heard of such a thing!"

Eddie jumped up rubbing his eyes. "Why, wasn't that dreadful for us to go to sleep! I didn't know we were going to do that!" he cried.

"It's all right, sonny," said the young man, looking at his watch. "No harm done. I guess we all needed a nap. But it was a pretty long one. It's half-past six now. We've been sleeping over an hour."

Wag and Archie had also risen to their feet, looking very much astonished and confused, but they were all soon laughing when they came to the table and found Jip sitting on a bench near it. He was evidently guarding the food from squirrels and chickens, and looked very sober and important.

"Oh, ain't he the best dog that ever was!" said Eddie, hugging the little fellow.

"It's lucky we had some one to look after us or we wouldn't have any supper left. I guess we'd better eat it now before we go to sleep again," laughed Uncle Weary.

Wag took the soft butter to the spring and exchanged it for a hard piece. Archie brought some fresh water, and Eddie warmed the potatoes again and made more tea.

They were all very peaceful and happy as they sat round the table for their early evening meal.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

The heat of the day was over, and a cool breeze stirred the tops of the pines. The air was still and sweet.

Uncle Weary left the table to smoke his pipe on a log by the smudge while the dishes were washed.

"I never had such a nice Fourth in my life," said Eddie, as they washed the plates after supper.

"I never had no Fourth before," said Wag, "except once when I drove the folks to town. I seen the percession and I heerd the cannon. But they wouldn't let me stay. I had to go home to work."

"I've had lots of 'em," said Archie, "but this Fourth's the best. It isn't over yet, though. You know, we haven't had the cannon yet. When are we going to fire it off, Uncle Weary?" he called.

"Soon's you get the work done up. We'd better name it the 'sunset gun,' I guess. You know, they fire those off in forts."

"Shall we have it here?" asked Eddie.

"Archie may pick out the spot for it to stand, Wag bring it out, and Eddie get the punk. It's a particular kind that's made for this cannon. Be very careful of it, Eddie. It's in a square pasteboard box in the den. Set it in the middle of the table, and I'll get it ready. Don't touch



## THE CANNON

the cover. This kind of punk goes off sometimes when boys are around."

All these directions were so mysterious that the boys were quite excited as they obeyed the orders. Archie was very eager, but Eddie rather dreaded the awful noise that was sure to come.

Wag brought out the bulky object. It was all his arms could lift, and placed it on the spot of ground Archie had prepared for it. But when the piece of burlap was taken off they saw an ice-cream freezer, and all laughed and clapped their hands.

"Oh, ice-cream!" shouted Eddie. "That's better than all the fire-crackers in the world!"

"We might have known Uncle Weary had another surprise for us," said Archie, running into the den for saucers and spoons.

"Now let's have the punk," said Uncle Weary, lifting a large frosted cake from the box.

There were four little American flags stuck in the top, and the letters A and E were outlined in pink on the white, shining surface.

"It's a great deal too pretty to eat," said Eddie, admiringly.

"That's what I think, sonny," said Uncle Weary, cutting big slices as he spoke. "But that's the way women folks do things. Em sent this to fire off the cannon with, and we have to do as she says."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Did Em really make that cake for us?" said the little boy. "Isn't she awfully good."

"You better tell her so when you see her," said Uncle Weary. "But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Let's try it."

The cake tasted even better than it looked, and Eddie was soon reconciled to cutting it.

Wag had never eaten ice-cream before, but when he had finished his first saucerful he agreed with Eddie that this was the best part of the celebration, although he had thought earlier in the day that nothing could equal the joy of firing crackers.

When the last morsel of ice-cream was scraped from the tin and half the cake put away, Uncle Weary said: "You'd better take a swim to-night. I guess you need it. It's no matter if you go to bed a little late, since you had a nap; I expect you're not as sleepy as usual."

Swimming on a summer evening is, for small boys, the next best thing to eating ice-cream. They agreed that nothing could be finer for winding up their delightful day. So they rested as usual after eating, and as soon as the dishes were washed and put away they started with Jip for the pond.

As they walked through the woods Eddie asked, "Can you dive, Wag?"

"Yes, 'course. Can't you?"



## THE CANNON

"No, Archie and I can swim. I always knew how, and he has learned so he can swim as well as I can, but we can't dive. We want to ever so much, but we're afraid to try till somebody shows us how."

"Uncle Weary said he would, but he never gets time," said Archie.

"What 'll ye gin me to larn ye?" asked Wag.

"I haven't got but five cents," said Eddie.

"It's wuth mor'n that, but seein' it's you I'll take it."

"I have ten cents," said Archie.

The farmer boy closed one eye and looked the child over critically. "You're littler than him," he said, at last, "so I'll have to charge ye more. The littler ye be the harder it is to larn ye."

"Will ten cents be enough?" said Archie, anxiously.

"Well, yes," said Wag, hesitatingly. "If it's all you've got, I guess I'll have to make it do. But yer gettin' a bargain, both on ye."

The boys were much impressed by this generosity, and agreed to give Wag his price as soon as they could get their money in the morning.

"You're sure he won't care?" said Wag, pointing with his thumb toward the camp.

"Uncle Weary says we may do just what we please with our own money," said Eddie.

"We earn it ourselves," added Archie. "He



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gives us a cent for every quart we pick and for every fish we catch."

"Ye ought to have a lot by this time," remarked the boy. "How'd ye come to be so short?"

"Why, I paid Mr. Stone fifteen cents for the squirrel, and Eddie bought a collar for Jip for twenty-five cents, and last week we bought some candy and a ball of twine for a kite."

"Well, ye better save up again. I'll have somethin' better'n them things to sell ye pretty soon."

They had reached the pond now, and in a twinkling were undressed and swimming about in the cool water. Wag seemed anxious to earn his money, for he worked faithfully with each little boy in turn until he was able to make the plunge into the dark, deep "hole" all alone, and come up sputtering and choking in the approved fashion.

After that he taught them several fancy tricks, which he told them were thrown in so they would be sure to get the worth of their money.

Uncle Weary had told them they might stay in longer than usual, so it was almost dark when they came out of the water, slipped into their clothes, and ran back to the clearing.

"What's that?" said Eddie, in great alarm, as they came near.

They had heard a queer, whizzing sound, and



## THE CANNON

now a bright ball of fire shot up into the sky and fell over in a rain of millions of sparks.

“It’s fireworks!” shouted Archie. “That’s why Uncle Weary let us go swimming to-night. He’s saved the best surprise for the last!”

It was no novelty to the little city boy. He was used to much finer and more elaborate displays than they had that night, but they had never seemed so wonderful to him before. He watched the pinwheels, the Roman candles, and the sky-rockets, as they blazed, one after the other, against the dark background of the great pines, and shared the excitement and almost awe of Wag and Eddie, and felt as though he had really never seen fireworks before.

“That’s all,” said Uncle Weary’s voice in the darkness, after the last bright fire balloon had disappeared. “Now go to bed and go to sleep. It’s been a pretty long day for you, but Fourth of July comes but once a year.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### THROUGH THE WOODS

WAG rose the next morning as soon as it was light enough to see the berries, and picked half enough for the hotel before breakfast. The little boys were never wakened, but as they went to bed usually at sunset they were up by five o'clock and ready, with a good appetite, for their hearty breakfasts, which were served at six o'clock. On the morning of the 5th, however, they slept an hour later.

Uncle Weary was late, too. "It's against the law to get up early on the 5th," he told them, when they appeared, "and we had a pretty big Fourth to tire us out, didn't we?"

"Oh, wasn't it the nicest that ever was!" said Eddie, fervently. "And the fireworks were the best surprise of all. They were just grand. Why, I couldn't get to sleep at first, they kept going through my head so!"

"Yes, I've heard of wheels in folks' heads after the Fourth," said Uncle Weary, dryly, "but I guess you'll get rid of 'em to-day."



## THROUGH THE WOODS

"Wag taught us to dive last evening," said Archie, "and he only charged me ten cents and Eddie five."

"It's all you had, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Do you think it was too much?"

"No, it was cheap enough," said the young man, laughing. "I wouldn't take the job for that price. But you'd better both look out for Wag. He'll cheat you out of your eye-teeth, I'm afraid."

"No," said Archie, eagerly, "he wants to pay for everything he gets, too. He wouldn't take one fire-cracker until we let him give us some liquorice."

"Well, that sounds fair," said the young man. "I guess Wag means well, but you don't want to pay his price for things unless you know they're worth it."

Breakfast was ready now, and after that was eaten the children picked berries until nine o'clock, and then all three started to the brook for trout.

"May Wag play with us after we get enough?" asked Archie.

"I guess so," said the young man, looking at the full baskets of nice berries. "Don't go too far off, and be back by dinner-time. Let me see if Archie's watch is going all right."

The strong little time-piece was tied firmly by



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a leather string into a button-hole of the boy's jacket. Eddie carried a compass fastened to him in the same way, so that their guardian felt sure they would be able to find their way back to camp at any given hour.

As they started off with their fishing-poles, Wag said, "Ask him if we can't go over to Stone's pond to fish for pick'rel."

"What's pick'rel?" asked Archie.

"Why, don't ye know that, ye little zany?" said the boy, laughing.

"It's a great big fish, Archie," explained Eddie. "He's never been in the country before, so he don't know as much about such things as we do, Wag. But he can beat me all to pieces catching trout."

"Well, we'll larn him to ketch pick'rel, too," said Wag, noticing that Archie looked mortified.

Uncle Weary squinted up at the sky when they asked him if they might carry out Wag's plan.

"It's kind of cloudy. Pretty good day for pickerel," he said. "I guess I'll let you go. But you'll have to make a day of it. It's three miles there, isn't it, Wag?"

"'Tain't so far through the woods," said the boy. "I know a cow-path that 'll take us by a short cut."

"Well, get out your knapsacks," said Uncle



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Weary. "You'll have to take your dinners and perhaps your suppers. But you must be home by seven, sure."

The boys promised excitedly to be on time, and all hands began to prepare for the expedition. The knapsacks had been made by Uncle Weary on a rainy day. They were of strong denim, with a flap which buttoned down to keep in live animals which the boys sometimes brought home with their other treasures. These bags were strapped on their backs, so that arms and hands were free to climb trees and handle sticks and stones, and the boys could go where they pleased without any trouble.

They agreed that they would take along some raw potatoes, slices of bacon, and plenty of bread and butter. Berries and perhaps a squirrel would provide enough extras.

The boys had never been allowed to carry matches on their tramps. But on this occasion they were to build a fire to cook their bacon and roast potatoes in the ashes, and Wag was cautioned to put out every spark when they were through, for fear of forest fires.

When they were ready to start Archie picked up his fishing-pole, but Wag said: "Ye don't want that, kid. That ain't no way to fish for pick'rel."

"Don't you catch all kinds of fish with a hook



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and line?" asked Archie, appealing to Uncle Weary.

"I do," said the young man, "but I suppose this smart Aleck's trying to show off how much more he knows than the rest of us."

It was Wag's turn now to be embarrassed. He began digging the earth with his toe and laughing foolishly, but he said nothing; and Eddie asked, "What 'll you do about trout to-day for the hotel if we don't catch any?"

"You don't think I'm going to let you have all the fun, do you? I think I'll take a day off and go fishing myself."

Eddie wasn't sure Uncle Weary was in earnest, so he ventured to say, "Well, I hope you won't be lonesome."

"Lonesome!" echoed the young man. "What did I do before you turned up?"

He went into the cave then and came out immediately with a small rifle. Archie's eyes sparkled as he asked, "Oh, where did you get that, and may we shoot with it?"

"You know about the woman who wouldn't let her boy go near the water till he could swim? Well, you can't use this till you learn to shoot."

Uncle Weary put the gun into Wag's hands and gave him a box of cartridges. "I bought this last week," he said. "I was going to use it yesterday, but we had banging enough without



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it. I expected to teach the boys to shoot at a mark, but I guess you can do as well as I. They say you're a pretty careful boy. I guess I can trust you."

There was a joyful grin on Wag's face, but he said nothing as he took the gun in his hands and examined it critically.

Archie was particularly happy over this surprise. For several years he had longed to have a real gun, such as his uncle George used in the Adirondack woods. But at home he had been impressed with the idea that it would be a long time before he would be old enough to handle one. And now it had come without his expecting it. It was the best thing, he thought, that had ever happened to him.

"Kin I shoot a squirrel if I see one?" said Wag, breaking his silence at last.

"Yes, of course," said Uncle Weary; "but don't let the boys shoot at anything but a mark to-day. When they hit that once or twice they may try to bring down some game."

Wag had not expressed any pleasure about the gun, but Uncle Weary understood New England boys well, and was sure that the lumbering, overgrown fellow was the happiest of the three as they started off.

Eddie and Archie were very familiar with the woods about the clearing. They roamed through



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them every day. But Wag soon led them into a new path which took them obliquely up the mountain, where they had never been before.

Archie whistled, Jip barked, and Eddie chattered as they walked along the path, but Wag was silent, looking sharply about him for squirrels.

"I can't never find one when yer so noisy," he said, at last. "You set down here a spell and keep the dog quiet."

They were now in an open space on the mountain-side. The boys sat on a flat stone, promising to keep still, while Wag went into the woods again. But Jip would not agree to be silent. He wriggled from Eddie's hands when the boy tried to hold his mouth shut, and darted into the woods in an opposite direction from the one Wag had taken.

In a few minutes they heard his cries of pain and fright, and followed quickly to see what was the matter.

Wag had heard the dog, too, and came running to join them, with a squirrel in one hand and the gun in the other.

"Oh, he'll be killed!" cried Eddie, as they found Jip rolling over and over with what seemed a brown ball of splinters in his paws.

"It's a porkypine," said Wag, loading his gun quickly. "Stand back, and I'll shoot him."



## THROUGH THE WOODS

The animal had seen the boys and darted away from the dog, but Wag was too quick for him. He took good aim, and his bullet hit the little creature in the head, killing him at once.

Fortunately the porcupine was young. His quills were not so stiff and hard as those of an older one. But they were bad enough, and some of them stuck in the mouth of the little dog, who came whining to Eddie for relief.

Wag took the cruel barbed quills out very skilfully with his knife, and said, as he finished: "There, I guess that 'll larn ye to let porkypines alone! They're more'n a match for a city dog like you!"

"What can we do for his poor mouth?" said Eddie, anxiously.

"A little bleedin' won't hurt him. We're 'most to a spring now, and a drink of cold water is what he wants. It's about time for dinner, too, I guess."

The children thought so, too, so they hastened to the spring and built a fire near it. There was plenty of dried wood lying about, and they soon had some hot ashes in which to roast the potatoes. Wag cut for each of them a pronged stick, like a big fork. On these prongs they stuck the bacon and joints of the squirrel, and roasted them over the live coals. It was hot, smoky work, and their faces were red and covered with per-



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spiration, but they thought the meat tasted a great deal better than any they had ever eaten cooked in a pot or a frying-pan. They were in too much of a hurry to gather berries for dessert, for Wag had told them he meant to have them try the new gun after dinner.

There was an old fence near them which they thought would make a good target. Eddie marked off a circle on a board, with a big bull's-eye in the centre, Wag loaded the gun, and at last they were ready.

"Now, I'll have to charge ye for this, ye know," said Wag. "Ye don't expect me to larn ye for nothin'."

"How much?" asked Eddie, anxiously.

"We gave you all the money we had for diving lessons yesterday," said Archie.

"I'll charge it up, and ye can pay me when ye get yer next money."

The boys were much relieved at this offer. They expected to have some more berry money the next day, so the bargain was made that for the hour they meant to spend at the practice they would pay Wag five cents apiece.

"How much are you going to pay Uncle Weary for using the gun yourself?" asked Archie.

"By jinks, I never thought of that," said Wag, looking rather blank. "I had ought to pay him,



## THROUGH THE WOODS

that's a fact! How much d'ye s'pose he'll charge me?"

"Why, nothing, of course," said Eddie. "He told you to use the rifle and never said a word about pay."

"I ain't no sponger. I just tell ye, now, I ain't agoin' to fire this gun without payin' for it."

"Well," said Archie, "I think he'd ask you what you charge us for lessons."

"Do ye?" said the big boy, eagerly. "Then I'll tell ye how we'll fix it. We'll call it square between us, and you can settle with him."

This pleased the boys. They wanted to shoot and were ready to agree to anything.

So they began. They didn't hit the mark, but it was fun just the same. Wag showed them how to load and hold the gun, and was very patient with their blunders. When they were through he said: "Well, ye did pretty well for such little tads. Ye can't expect to hit the bull's-eye first off, ye know."

"Do you suppose Uncle Weary will let us shoot again to-morrow?" asked Archie.

"I guess so," said Wag, shouldering the gun. "But we better be gittin' on now, or we won't ketch no pick'rel to-day."

They made no more stops after this, and about one o'clock they reached the fish-pond. It was



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a quiet, crooked little sheet of water, with trees on three sides of it, and a small, rocky farm on the other. A tiny brown house stood near the edge of the pond. It had two windows and a door in front, and an ell with a porch on one side.

It was so still all about, the children thought the place must be deserted. But Wag stepped at once on to the clean, sagging floor of the porch and rapped loudly on the open door. "Old Mis' Stone's deaf," he explained. "Ye have to thump like the mischief to make her hear."



## CHAPTER XIV

### PICKEREL

**W**AG knocked again, but nobody answered. At last they peeped through a window and saw a little old woman in a rocking-chair apparently sound asleep.

"She'll never hear us," said Wag. "I guess we'll have to go in and wake her up. No, we won't," he added, immediately, "here comes Mr. Stone."

A stooping old man, leaning on a cane, came limping round the corner of the porch. "Can't ye make her hear?" he called to Wag. "She must be takin' a nap. Come in and I'll find out."

The light was so dim in the little sitting-room that the boys could hardly make out the objects in it, but they heard a cracked old voice saying: "What's the matter, Hiram? Was I snorin'?"

"Wake up, ma! You've got some company!" shouted the old man, close to her ear.

"For massy's sake! Is that so!" exclaimed the old woman, rising slowly from her chair and



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hobbling toward the door where her visitors stood. "I must 'a' ben takin' a cat nap. Ye wasn't knocking long, was ye?"

"They might 'a' knocked an hour and ye wouldn't 'a' heerd 'em. If they'd 'a' ben robbers they'd 'a' carried the house off," chuckled the old man.

"I guess by their looks they ain't robbers," said his old wife, peering into the faces of the boys.

"Why, this is Lem Judkins, ain't it!" she exclaimed. "Y've grow'd so I didn't know ye. And who be these little fellers?"

"It's that campin' man's young ones, ma. Y' know I've had some dicker with him, and I told ye about him," said her husband.

"Oh yes, I remember now. I'm glad to see ye," she said, turning to the boys. "Won't ye set down? I'm so lame I can't git round very fast. Y'll have to git yer own chairs."

"We can't set down," said Wag. "We came to fish for pick'rel."

She had brought out her ear-trumpet now, and could hear very well. "My, what a pity!" she said, "and ye come so far, too! But I'm afraid ye can't do no fishing to-day. 'Lonzo's gone to town to git his wagon fixed. He keeps his boat locked up so nobody can use it when he's gone."



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"I'll take 'em fishin' in my boat," said the old man.

"Now don't you do no such foolish thing, Hiram!" exclaimed his wife, anxiously. "You know 'Lonzo won't like it a mite. He's afraid ye'll git upset in that ticklish little boat o' yourn, and your rheumatiz is so bad ye can hardly hold the oars."

"Cat's hind leg!" said the old fellow, impatiently. "What does 'Lonzo know about it? I've ketched pick'rel in that there pond afore he was born. I guess I know what I'm about."

"But, pa—" still protested the old woman, following him to the door.

"Don't say nothin' more about it, Sarey. I'm goin'. Come on, boys."

"Well, if you will go," she said, in a resigned tone, "ye better put on yer coat. Like as not it 'll be cold out on the water."

The old man took the garment from her hand, and she turned to the boys, saying: "It's a nice day for fishin'. Ye ought to git a lot on 'em. Ye know we always take half that folks ketch here, don't ye?"

"That's all right, Mis' Stone," said Wag, as they moved away. "We'll divide up even."

They found the boat in a tumble-down shed near the pond, but it was too small to carry more than two at a time. The old man climbed slow-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

ly and painfully into it and placed the weather-beaten oars in their sockets.

"Guess I'd better take the littlest feller first," he said. "We'll see how it goes with him, and the other two of ye can take turns arterward."

Archie was placed in a seat at the stern of the boat, Wag pushed them off, and the old farmer began to row carefully and creakingly out toward deeper water.

"Ye ain't afeard of the water, be ye?" he asked the little boy.

"No, I'm not afraid," said Archie. "I can swim."

"Well, ye won't have to to-day," chuckled the old man, "unless a big pick'rel pulls ye overboard."

"How do you catch 'em?" asked Archie.

"Y'll find out pretty quick." He picked up a long fish-line wound around a piece of shingle. "We call this a trollin'-line, ye know."

"Do the fish bite that tin thing?" asked Archie, pointing to a showy object fastened at the end of the line. This was a spoon-shaped piece of tin, red on one side and white on the other, fastened to a swivel so that it would revolve when dragged through the water, and there were also some gaudy feathers nearly hiding three sharp hooks.

"Pick'rel hain't got much gumption," an-



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swered the old man, "but they've got lots of cur'osity. They foller along to see what that whirler is. Most likely they think it's some kind of little fish. So they swaller it, and first thing they know they feel the hooks, and there they be." Then he began to row, and Archie dropped the spoon into the water, unreeling the line until the bright metal was whirling just under the surface quite a distance astern.

For a time everything was quiet. Suddenly there was a splash behind them and a sharp tug at the line.

"It's a fish! It's a fish!" shouted Archie.

"I vum, I believe 'tis!" said the old fisherman, equally excited. "Now you do just as I tell ye, or ye'll lose him. Pick'rel's awful game. You got to manage 'em just right, or they'll git away from ye!"

"What shall I do?" asked the boy.

"Take a good hold on the line and haul in. If he jerks hard let it out ag'in, so he'll think he's free. When he's quiet draw him in ag'in, and then let him out not quite so far, and keep that up till he's tired. Do ye s'pose ye kin do it? Gol! if I didn't have the rheumatiz so bad, I'd fix him!"

"Oh, I can do it," said Archie, confidently, "if you'll just tell me how. I want to haul him in myself, awfully!"



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"Well, I guess I'll have to let ye try. There! Let the line out, quick!" he shouted. "He'll git away from ye, sure as guns!"

Archie had learned to catch trout, and his experience was useful now. He soon found out how far he could draw the struggling fish toward him and when he must slacken the line.

"Well, it beats all how well ye do it for the fust time. I guess y'll git him arter all," said the old man, encouragingly, as the boy braced himself and played the strong fish when it struggled to break away. Forward and back, to this side and that, rushed the pickerel, now and then beating the water into foam. The boat rocked, and once water came over the sides. But both old and young fisherman were too absorbed to think of danger.

"Hold on to him! Give him line! Haul him in now, he's 'most tuckered out!" the old man shouted, as the battle went on.

"I'll get him," said the little fellow between his clenched teeth, tugging desperately. But he was growing tired. For a moment it seemed doubtful if he could capture his prize. But he held on, and suddenly the fish gave up. Very carefully Archie drew it to the boat, and, with the old man's help, it was lifted over the side.

Archie dropped into his seat panting. He was too happy for words, even if he could have



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spoken. But the old man chuckled joyously: "By jinks, ain't he a monster! I wonder what 'Lonzo 'll say to him. We haven't caught a bigger one in this pond for ten years."

The gasping pickerel was knocked on the head and lay quietly at Archie's feet. "How long is he, and how much do you think he weighs?" asked the little boy, wishing that his father and Uncle George could see him now.

Mr. Stone took a two-foot rule from his pocket and measured the fish. "He's two foot and one inch, and he weighs all of five pounds," he answered. "You're a pretty stout little feller to hang on 's ye did," he went on; "and he pulled like the mischief, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Archie. "He was awful strong. But I think it's fun to catch pickerel. Can't we try for another?"

"I guess we'll have to gin ye one more chance if ye ain't beat out, but I expect the other fellers are gittin' anxious to have their turn come."

"We don't have to get home till seven o'clock," urged Archie.

"All right. Git yer wind back a little, and then we'll make another haul, maybe. But you mustn't expect another fish as big as this."

They bailed the water from the boat and put the line out again. Mr. Stone rowed steadily, and both pairs of eyes were fastened intently on



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the shining spoon under the water. They had let out all the line, and Archie was holding it near the end.

"By gracious, if we hain't got another!" exclaimed the old man in a few minutes, as the line began to waver. "And he's a whopper, too!"

There was a sudden jerk, and to Archie's surprise the line was pulled from his tired fingers. The big fish had spoon, line, and all. He looked after it in dismay as it quickly disappeared. "Why, how did that happen?" he cried.

"Don't ye see! The pesky critter got away with the hull thing." The old man took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he spoke.

"Can't we go back and get another line?" asked Archie.

"All the lines are locked up in 'Lonzo's boat-house. This was all I had. I expect you was rather tuckered, and the big feller was too much for ye. But it can't be helped," he added, kindly, noticing the boy's downcast looks. "Ye did the best ye could, and ye got one big feller, anyway. But now the line's gone, we might as well go back to land."

Wag and Eddie had been exploring while they waited, and each one had found a treasure. They had come across an old, deserted charcoal-burner's camp, where in one of the sheds was a little, half-



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starved kitten. It was mewling feebly, and did not try to run away when the boys came near it. When Eddie picked it up he found that one of its eyes was closed and the other half shut.

"Poor little thing," said the boy, pityingly. "I wonder if Uncle Weary would let me keep it!"

"I wouldn't take that mangy thing," said Wag. "If you want a cat, why don't you have a good one. Anybody'd gin it to ye. Folks is always trying to git rid o' kittens."

"I like this one," said Eddie, "and I'm going to ask Mrs. Stone to let me have it."

Wag couldn't understand such foolishness, but he laughed and went off whistling toward the pond, while Eddie ran to the house with the kitten.

Mrs. Stone was very kind. "'Course you may have it," she said. "I expect it's one of old Betsey's kittens. 'Lonzo drowned the hull batch, or thought he did, but this one must hev got away. Some cats seem to have mor'n nine lives. Ye can't kill 'em."

She gave the little outcast some warm milk, which it drank eagerly, and then cuddled down into Eddie's arms and went to sleep.

The child was sitting on the door-step stroking the rough fur of his new pet when Mr. Stone and Archie came up with the big pickerel.



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"Ain't that a whopper for this little tyke to ketch, ma?" said the old man, holding up the fish for her to see.

His wife raised her hands in astonishment. "Ye don't mean to tell me he pulled that whale into the boat alone!" she cried.

"No," said Archie, "Mr. Stone helped me do that, but I partly caught him."

"Well, I'd think it ud take both on ye to handle him. How on earth could ye do anything, pa, when yer so lame?"

"I guess I forgot all about the rheumatiz for once, Sarey," giggled the old man.

"I sh'd say ye did! Look at yer pants! And yer feet's soppin wet, too, ain't they? Come right in and change your clothes. You'll be laid up ag'in to pay for this! I never see such an old coot!"

She went in, grumbling, and the old man followed meekly, although he didn't look so sorry as perhaps he ought.

While Archie was telling Eddie of his wonderful experience in the boat, Wag came up the road in his shirt-sleeves, his coat wrapped round an object he carried under his arm. He laid it down carefully when he reached the door-step, and began examining Archie's big fish while he listened to the story of its capture.

He made no comment until Archie had fin-



## PICKEREL

ished, and then said, "What's yer price for him?"

"He isn't mine to sell," said Archie. "Mrs. Stone said they take half, and we haven't but one, so I suppose we'll have to give it to them."

"No," interrupted Eddie, eagerly. "Didn't you hear Mr. Stone say you caught it? I know he means to give it to you; and isn't it great for Archie to catch the biggest fish in the pond, Wag? And the first time he tried, too!"

The old couple came out now, and Archie said, "Here's your fish, Mrs. Stone. We didn't get but one, and so it belongs to you."

The old woman looked pleased. "Well," she said, "if you don't want it, we'll be glad to have it for supper. It 'll make a nice mess for us."

"Now, Sarey," said her husband, indignantly, "ain't ye ashamed to take the little feller's fish away from him?"

"But she said you took half, you know," interrupted Archie, "and I didn't get it all alone. It's more yours than mine."

"Well, I guess you've earned it, bub. You worked like a nailer for it, and you'd ought to have it. You take it right along."

But the little boy's sense of justice was not satisfied, although he wanted very much to take the fish home to show Uncle Weary.

"She wants it," he began, "and—"



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

But the discussion was ended here. Mrs. Stone laid the fish on the table and cut it in two with a sharp knife.

"Massy sakes, ma, what you doin'?" said the farmer, too late to hinder her. "Now you've sp'iled it for him."

"No, I hain't. It's plenty big enough for two messes, and it 'll be an awful sight easier for him to carry home now."

"Well, you're the beatenest!" said the old man, turning away.

Archie was sorry to have his beautiful pickerel cut in two, but half a fish was better than none, and he was very glad to have the head part given to him, for now he could show Uncle Weary how big it really was.

Eddie was rather glad that there was no more fishing to be done that day. He did not care for the sport as much as Archie, and he was now very much interested in his kitten and wanted to get home with it as soon as possible.

Wag was disappointed, but he was too good-natured to fret about what couldn't be helped. He proposed now to start back, going a round-about way to a deserted farm where he thought they could get some spruce-gum.

"Ain't ye going to gin 'em somethin' to eat, ma?" called Mr. Stone, as the boys rose to go.

Mrs. Stone was in the pantry, and answered,



## PICKEREL

rather testily: "That's what I'm gittin'. Ye needn't be in sech a stew, pa. Ye never knew me to starve children, did ye?"

They had in their knapsacks plenty of food for supper, but the fresh seed-cookies brought out to them looked very tempting, so they each took one and began eating it as they walked away, Wag carrying his bundle hanging from the rifle on his shoulder, Archie with his precious half-pickerel fastened on a strong twig, Eddie tenderly holding in his arms his little waif, and the much-subdued Jip following silently.

"Come again," said Farmer Stone, heartily, as he let down the bars for them to pass through; and, handing a package of green corn to Eddie, he added: "Take these roastin' ears to yer uncle. They'll taste kinder good, I guess. Campers generally likes 'em fust-rate."



## CHAPTER XV

### THE MENAGERIE

“**W**HAT’S that done up in your coat, Wag?” asked Eddie, at last, noticing the mysterious bundle.

For answer Wag laid his coat down on the grass and, opening its folds, showed them a half-grown turtle.

“Will you sell him?” asked Eddie, who had looked in vain for one to keep by the spring.

“What ’ll ye gin me for him?”

“Five cents.”

“’Tain’t enough. I kin git twenty-five for him from a boy at the hotel.”

“But I can’t afford more than ten, anyway,” said the boy.

“Well, seein’ it’s you, I’ll let ye hev him for twelve cents. You know, ’tain’t cash down. I’ll hev to charge ye for it, and that makes it come higher.”

Eddie agreed to this price, and the turtle became his.



## THE MENAGERIE

"But how'll ye carry it and yer cat at the same time?" asked Wag.

"You ought to deliver your goods," said Archie. "Other folks do."

"That's a fact. I didn't think o' that. I'll carry him home for ye."

The good-natured fellow began to tie up the bundle again, but the boys had not seen enough of the new treasure. They begged Wag to let them play with him, and began poking under his shell with sticks to make him snap at them. But the animal seemed to be rather torpid and slow. He stuck out his head once, feebly, then drew it back, and could not be induced to show any sign of life again.

"What's the matter of him?" asked Eddie. "I never saw one before that wouldn't snap at a stick."

"Perhaps he ain't the snappin' kind," remarked Wag.

Archie turned the creature on its back to see it right itself, but it lay perfectly still, and, looking closer, they found that its lower shell was cracked.

Before the boys could say anything, Wag exclaimed: "Why, how did that happen, I wonder? I didn't turn him over when I found him, and he looked all right. I'll hev to throw off some-thin' from the price."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"You don't want him at all, do you, Eddie?" Archie asked. "He'll die soon, won't he?"

"Oh, Uncle Weary can mend him all right," said Eddie. "You gave him to me so cheap, Wag, you needn't throw off anything."

But Wag insisted on reducing the price. "I ain't no cheater," he said. "If it's damaged, it ain't wuth so much as a sound one. I'll throw off five cents."

Eddie thought this was quite enough to deduct, and so it was settled. Wag then wrapped the wounded creature in his coat and they started on.

The old Wilkins farm, where they were going for spruce-gum, was in a lonely spot on the mountain-side, higher than the clearing and about half a mile away. Before turning into the old wood road leading to this place the boys found the dead porcupine, which had been placed in the crotch of a tree ready to take home on their return. Wag tied its hind legs together and carried it in his left hand, hanging on a strong bit of twine. Soon they came to a good stopping-place by a running brook, and decided to eat supper there.

It was a cold meal, as they had no time for a fire to roast potatoes and broil bacon. There were only two hours before they must be at home, and they wanted to spend part of that time shooting



## THE MENAGERIE

at a mark on the Wilkins barn. So they only stopped long enough to eat their bread and butter and doughnuts and drink some cold water from the spring.

The little homestead looked very forlorn and forsaken when they reached it. The weather-beaten clapboards were hanging loose, the doors were fallen in, and the glass was gone from all the windows.

Wag had been there several times, and seemed very familiar with the place. "This is the way to the barn," he said, as he took the boys through a tiny orchard, with half a dozen old, gnarled trees in it, and a small garden where the weeds were taller than their heads.

"There used to be a well back o' the house where we could git some water for the dog," he said, stopping, as Jip came up to Eddie with his tongue hanging out.

The child put down the kitten and started to look for the water at once, but in a moment the others heard him exclaiming: "Oh, come here, quick! There's something at the bottom of a hole. It looks like a little calf."

They hurried to the place and looked in. "By gum, it's a fawn!" exclaimed Wag.

"Do you mean a little deer?" asked Archie, excitedly.

"Yes, of course. This hole's a well that old



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

man Wilkins started to dig, and then giv' it up 'cause the witch-hazel said they want no water there. I s'pose the deers come round here, and that's how the little critter fell in."

"Can't we get him out?" asked Eddie.

"I dunno. P'r'aps so. I'll see if I kin find a spade or somethin' to dig with."

An old shovel with a broken handle was found in a shed, and with this Wag began to dig away one side of the old well to make an inclined plane. The hole was not more than four feet deep, so there was no trouble in doing this, and he soon slipped down to the trembling little creature lying at the bottom.

"He's broke his leg, and I guess he's nigh starved. 'Tain't wuth while to git him out, is it?" he called to the boys, after a short examination.

"Oh yes. Don't leave it there to die," implored Eddie. "Let's take it to Uncle Weary. He knows how to cure everything."

Archie was also very anxious to rescue the fawn, feeling sure its leg could be mended and they would be able to tame it.

"I don't see how we can," said Wag. "We can't never lift it out o' here, and if 'tain't done pretty quick it 'll be dead, sure."

"Can't you tie him up in your coat, like the mud-turtle, and let us haul him out?" suggested



## THE MENAGERIE

Eddie. "I guess we could find some rope round here somewhere."

"He's too big for that," said Wag. "See his long legs."

The little fawn looked up to the children with large, imploring eyes, and when it saw Jip it seemed almost frantic with fear, and struggled to rise.

"Take the dog away!" shouted Wag. "He'll scare this thing to death!"

They had a string with them with which they tied Jip to a tree, and then all three of them went to the house to search for something to use in their task, and were lucky in finding what would serve their purpose very well.

In one of the tiny bedrooms was a wooden post bedstead, with a rope crossed back and forth from its sides in squares to hold a straw bed. The bed-ticking was old and patched. The people leaving the house had evidently either forgotten it or thought it not worth carrying away.

Wag said it would answer their purpose, and the rope was exactly what they wanted. So he unlaced and wound it into a coil while the children carried down the bed. The hole was big enough for the three boys to work in comfortably, and they lifted the suffering little creature on the makeshift stretcher. Wag fastened the rope to the big bundle, which he made by



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

tying the four corners of the bed together, and in this way they were able very easily to haul their burden up the inclined plane.

The fawn was too frightened to stir when they landed it on the ground, and looked from one to the other as though begging them to be kind. It had a beautiful head, with a delicate nose, large bright-brown eyes, and pink-lined ears, and its light-brown body was dotted with white spots.

As soon as he saw the fawn by a good light, Wag decided that he wanted to own it. "I'll gin ye twenty-five cents for him," he said, turning to Eddie.

"Why, it's as much yours as mine," returned the boy. "It belongs to all of us."

"No, it's yours. You found it. But I want to buy it."

"What would you do with it, Wag?" asked Archie.

"I'd sell it to a boy at the hotel. He'd gin me as much as a dollar for it, maybe."

"But its leg's broken, you know. You couldn't sell it that way."

"I'd git yer uncle to mend it. I'd pay him out o' the dollar. He wouldn't charge mor'n fifty cents, I guess, and then I'd make a quarter."

"Why shouldn't Eddie sell it and make the quarter?" argued Archie.

"He don't know the boy," said Wag.



## THE MENAGERIE

But Eddie interrupted them by saying: "If the fawn's mine, I don't think I'll sell it. I want it for a pet for Archie and me."

"All right," said the pliant Wag. "It's yourn to do what ye please with. But if we don't start pretty quick we sha'n't git home by seven o'clock."

All idea of shooting had to be given up, of course. The turtle was placed in Archie's knapsack, Eddie carried the kitten in his, Wag shouldered the rifle with the porcupine dangling from it, and with his right hand grasped one side of the bundle, while the two children carried the other side with their left hands, their right hands being occupied with the pickerel and the roasting-ears. It was a hard, toilsome trip home over the stony paths through the woods, but it was downhill all the way, and that was in their favor.

They were just one minute late when they reached the camp and began to tell Uncle Weary the story of the day's adventures.

He laughed heartily when they had finished, and said: "Well, this is what you call pickerel-fishing, is it? You've brought home a wounded dog, a sick kitten, a cracked turtle, a broken-legged deer, and half a fish. I call this a menagerie, and a lame one at that. You want me to doctor 'em, do you? I'll have a hospital on my hands at this rate. But I'm glad the porcupine



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

is dead. You can't expect me to fix him up, anyway."

Archie was disappointed that no more notice was taken of his pickerel. But Uncle Weary made matters right with him at the supper-table by remarking, as they picked the bones: "Pretty good fish, sonny. I guess you're going to make a first-class fisherman."



## CHAPTER XVI

### ANOTHER CELEBRATION

UNCLE WEARY had told the boys that his birthday came on the eleventh of July.

"I'm apt to forget it nowadays," he had said, "but when I was your age I remembered fast enough, for Aunt Nancy always made a big frosted cake for me, and asked my cousins to spend the day and help eat it. She said she was glad it didn't come any sooner, for it gave her a chance to rest up a little after the Fourth before any more doings."

"How old are you?" Eddie had asked.

"I'm an old man, three times your age, sonny. If you can figure that out, you'll know."

He had thought no more of the conversation, and, as usual, had forgotten about the anniversary; but the boys remembered, and made up their minds to give him a surprise. After settling with Wag, each of them had about twenty-five cents. Archie decided to buy a knife with his money. He knew Uncle Weary needed a new



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

one, and Eddie thought he would get a bright-blue necktie he had seen in the store window and admired very much.

When they told Wag of their plan he was very much pleased. "That's the thing to do, boys!" he cried, "and, by ginger, I'll gin him somethin' myself!"

"That 'll be nice. What will it be?" asked Eddie.

"I dunno; I'll have to think about it a spell. I'll tell ye to-morrow."

"You'd better get it to-night," said Archie, who was "forehanded." "The birthday comes day after to-morrow, and we want to put our presents on the breakfast-table. You know, you don't get here until after that."

Wag promised to have his gift ready in time, and then spent the day in thinking. He answered the boys' questions in an absent-minded way, and seemed not to hear them sometimes when they spoke to him. But he was as good as his word, and brought his contribution the next day. With a beaming face he handed Archie his parcel, and told him to put it carefully away in a safe place where thieves couldn't find it.

"What is it?" asked Archie, rather blankly, as the heavy, oblong object was placed in his hands.



## ANOTHER CELEBRATION

"Why, it's a whetstun. Hain't ye never seen one afore?"

"No," said Archie, apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I don't know what it's used for."

"It's to sharpen scythes that cut grass," said Eddie.

"But Uncle Weary doesn't use scythes."

"He'll have one sometime," said Wag, confidently, "and then it 'll come in handy."

"Can't he sharpen his knife on it?" asked Archie.

"It's too coarse for that," said Eddie, examining the stone. "But I know Uncle Weary will like it," he added, fearing to hurt Wag's feelings.

"'Course he will," said the farmer boy, emphatically. "They ain't nothin' a man likes so much as a good new whetstun, and this is the best one I could find. It cost me eighteen cents. I beat down old Wilson seven cents on it."

In the afternoon, when the children went to the village to buy their presents, Eddie was much disappointed. He found that some one else had liked the blue necktie and had taken it away. He could find nothing now in the store that suited him. He and Archie had been sent to the hotel with the berries, and afterward were to go about half a mile beyond the village to buy some goose eggs. They decided they would do



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

this errand, and perhaps on the way would be able to think of something to buy when they went back to the village. It was a lucky plan, for before they returned Eddie's present came to him in a very unexpected way.

They found the house they were looking for easily enough. It stood in plain view near the road, with a rail fence enclosing it, and a flock of noisy geese in its large yard.

As they came near, the boys saw a group of little children, the oldest not more than six years old, who seemed to be in great distress. They were crying and screaming, and in their midst was a white object fluttering and swaying about.

"It's our old gander," sobbed the oldest child. "He's got caught in the fence, and we can't git him out."

Eddie was strong and quick. He saw at once what to do, and lifted the end of a heavy rail which with another one formed a sort of V, into which the bird's neck had become wedged. The more it tried to free itself the tighter it stuck, and it was almost strangled when Eddie released it, and for a few minutes it lay on the grass gasping for breath.

"Why didn't you call your folks to get him out?" asked Archie.

"They ain't anybody at home but us," said one



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little fellow. "Papa is in the wood-lot, and mama has gone to Aunt Sue's to get some yeast."

"Oh, here's mama!" exclaimed a little girl. They all turned and saw a young woman coming rapidly toward them.

"What's the matter, children?" she called, anxiously. "Is anybody hurt?"

"Old Cæsar's most killed," said the oldest child, as they all ran to meet her. "He got stuck in the fence, and we all pulled to get him out and we couldn't, and this boy lifted the rail up and then he got loose."

"Oh, you poor, silly old thing!" said the woman, bending over the gander. "Are you trying to hang yourself in your old age?"

The bird struggled to his feet and waddled off to join his excited quacking family, as though offended by her words.

"I guess he's all right now," said the woman, seeming much relieved. "I expect you saved his life," she went on, laying her hand on Eddie's shoulder, "and I can't tell you how much obliged we are. We think everything of old Cæsar."

"Oh, that wasn't anything, just to lift up the rail," said the boy, blushing.

"Oh yes, it was a good deal to know just what to do and do it right off. There ain't many that would have thought so quick. You are the boys



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Mr. Williams sent for the eggs, I guess; they're all ready for you. Come in, and I'll get them."

She had a sweet voice and manner, and, as the whole troop followed her into the house, Archie and Eddie felt as though they had always known and liked her.

They were taken into a clean little parlor with a painted floor. "The windows are darkened to keep out the flies," she explained, as she lifted a green shade and opened one of them to let in the fresh air.

The children were not allowed to go into the room, and peeped shyly through the door while their mother went away for the eggs. Archie had never seen a room like it, but it seemed very familiar to Eddie. Almost everything in it was home-made. There were several round and oblong braided rugs of bright colors on the floor. The lounge and chairs were covered with red cotton cloth. The table was a box, with a spread of "crazy-quilt" design made from silk and woollen pieces; and the simple pictures on the walls had frames either of straw, acorns, or leather-work. The only things that had been bought seemed to be a little melodeon in one corner, a lamp which had a home-made shade of green paper, and a sheet-iron stove.

Their hostess soon returned to the cheerful little room with a basket in her hand.



## ANOTHER CELEBRATION

"Here are your eggs," she said. "And now I want to give this little boy something to show how much I appreciate his saving our old gander."

"Oh no!" Eddie cried, greatly distressed. "Please don't! I'd feel dreadful to have you pay me for doing that little thing."

"But I want to," she urged. "Not to pay you, of course—I couldn't do that—but to give you some little thing just for my own sake. You know how you'd feel," she continued, sitting down by the child and smiling on him. "Suppose I had saved a pet of yours from being killed, wouldn't you be sorry if I wouldn't take for a keepsake something you had made?"

Eddie smiled understandingly, and she went on: "Well, that's the way with me. Now, I wish you'd choose something in this parlor that you like. Of course, I mean something you could carry home. I made all the pictures and the frames and the rugs and tidies and lamp-mat, and I would just love to give you any one of them."

She had convinced him that she would be hurt if he still refused, and it had occurred to him that here was his chance to get a nice birthday present.

There was a small crocheted tidy on a chair near them. Its design was two little birds facing



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

each other, with their bills touching. Eddie pointed to this, and said, shyly:

“Well, if you want me to, I will; I like that ever so much.”

“The kissing birds? Well, I’m glad you do,” she said, heartily, beginning to unpin the tidy. “I think it’s pretty, too. It’s my favorite pattern.”

“I can take another if you’d rather keep that,” said Eddie.

“Bless your heart, dear, that’s the easiest kind to do. I can make another in two evenings, and I love to do it. I want you should have this.”

She folded it neatly, wrapped it in brown paper, and slipped the package into his pocket as she spoke.

“You’re two nice little boys. I’m glad you came,” she said, kissing them when they were ready to go; “and I hope our old gander will have sense enough not to hang himself until you come again.”

Archie started ahead with the basket of eggs, but Eddie lingered a moment to say:

“You wouldn’t care, would you, if I gave this tidy to Uncle Weary for his birthday?”

“Why, no, dear. I’d love to have you give it to him. It will make a nice present.”

She kissed him again, and called the children to go to the spring-house to get their visitors a



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drink of cold buttermilk before they started on the journey home. Eddie was very fond of buttermilk, and drank a large mugful from a jar among some stones by the spring. Archie liked water best, and after quenching his thirst they started for the village.

"What 'll Uncle Weary do with a tidy?" asked Archie, as soon as they were alone.

"Don't you think it will look nice on his barrel-chair?" asked Eddie.

"Oh yes, I forgot that. Of course, it will be pretty there. I know he'll like it."

"I hope so," said Eddie. "I believe it 'll be better than the necktie. It will last longer."

There was a great consultation over Archie's gift when they reached the store. Every knife in the show-case was looked at carefully and its merits discussed. Mr. Wilson, the storekeeper, was very kind, and when Archie wished very much to buy one of his best knives, with four blades and cork-screw, he put the price down to fifty cents. Eddie loaned him twenty-five, so he was able to make his purchase, and went home much elated.

They put all of the gifts in Eddie's knapsack and took it to bed with them, for fear Uncle Weary might happen to look into it before morning, and they fell asleep in the midst of a discussion as to how they should present the gifts.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

They were wide awake earlier than usual the next day, and prepared breakfast before Uncle Weary was stirring. When he appeared they led him to his seat at the table and began beating his back and counting the strokes.

"Hullo! what does this mean?" said the young man, much surprised. "Oh, I see, you've remembered my birthday. I'd forgotten it entirely. Pound away, but I'm afraid you'll be tired out before you count twenty-nine."

He was very much pleased with his gifts. "I haven't had such a good knife for a long time," he said, examining the blades carefully. "You knew just what I wanted, didn't you, Archie? And where did you get this fandangle, and what do you do with it?" he asked, holding up the tidy by two corners.

"Why, that's to put on the back of the chair you made out of the barrel." Eddie hastened to tell him.

"To be sure. That 'll fix us out as fine as a fiddle. I like it first-rate. You couldn't have suited me any better."

The children were very happy to have their little presents so much appreciated, but they were somewhat surprised at the way Uncle Weary received Wag's gift. He laughed, as they thought he would, but he also seemed to like it.

"To think he actually spent his money for



## ANOTHER CELEBRATION

me! Well, well! I must try to deserve that," he said, putting the whetstone away with his other gifts.

When the farmer's boy appeared, a little later, with a red face and sheepish manner, Uncle Weary said: "Hullo, Wag! That's a good whetstone. I like it. When I go to farming, that 'll come into play first-rate."

Wag said nothing, but he showed all his teeth in a wide smile, and the young man knew he was very happy as he began his morning's work.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

THE little fawn seemed to be better. Its broken leg was bound in splints, and it was fastened by ropes and straps into a sort of stall contrived for it among the trees in such a way that it was obliged to keep perfectly quiet, and could move nothing but its head. It was still very timid, and trembled when it heard Jip bark, but it drank milk and ate lettuce from Uncle Weary's hand, and allowed the boys to stroke its delicate nose without being frightened.

Eddie named it "Lillian," after Archie's mother; and, of all their pets, the boys cared for it the most.

"You'd better sell it to Wag," said Uncle Weary, when Eddie told of the farmer boy's offer. "We shall be leaving here by-and-by, and we can't take it with us. You mustn't get to thinking too much of it, or you will feel bad when you have to leave it."

Accordingly, a bargain was made that Wag was



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to take the fawn for twenty-five cents when the children were obliged to leave camp, provided it was in a condition to sell to the boy at the hotel.

The kitten was improving, too, with plenty of good food and no fear of enemies. Its eyes soon became well, its fur sleek, and it was as playful as kittens usually are. They were all very fond of it, and named it "Minnie," after Eddie's cousin.

Their other invalid, the turtle, was kept in a bed of mud. He still showed signs of life, but was very torpid. Uncle Weary said if he ever got well it would be by leaving him alone. With these ailing pets to care for, it was rather difficult for them all to leave the clearing at the same time. But, since they had Wag, the boys occasionally made trips away with Uncle Weary.

Once they went over the mountain with him to see a horse which was disabled with rheumatism, and on another day they visited a farm in a valley ten miles away, where the young man had been called to doctor some cows, and, as payment for his services, had brought home a little squealing pig to add to their menagerie. They never knew when they were to make these excursions until it was time to start, and it was part of the fun to guess where they were going.

It was some time after the birthday when Un-



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cle Weary came in the morning to the berry-patch and said, "Well, boys, what do you say to a tramp with me to-day?"

There was only one answer to that question, and that was given with a joyous whoop.

"Well, then, get out your knapsacks, put on your shoes, and take your jackets."

"Are we to carry a lunch?" asked Archie.

"No, we'll get back in time for that. Somebody will have to stay at home to look after things and cook dinner. You can do that, can't you, Wag?"

The big boy was very much pleased to be given this responsibility, and agreed to take good care of everything while they were gone, and to cook them a fine dinner. The children were full of curiosity while they were making their preparations, and could not imagine the kind of fun in store for them; and the mystery deepened when the young man came out of the Den dressed in an old coat and overalls and carrying a small fire-balloon left over from the Fourth.

"Are you going to send that up in daytime, Uncle Weary?" asked Archie.

"You'll see. You know there's a great fashion for air-ships nowadays. Well, who knows? Perhaps we'll take a sail above the trees in this one. You don't know how much of a wizard I am."



## A CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

They all laughed, though Eddie half believed Uncle Weary *could* fly, if he wanted to.

"I suppose you want to know where we're going," said Uncle Weary, as they walked along.

"Yes, I do," said Archie.

"Well, we are going to make a 'Contribution to Science.'"

"I don't know what that means," said the boy, looking puzzled.

"I guess you'll have to wait and see."

"It's a surprise," said Eddie, smiling.

"We'll get our names in the newspapers if our contribution comes out all right. That would surprise you, wouldn't it?" laughed Uncle Weary.

Their walk through the woods took them in a new direction. They went down the mountain-side some distance, crossed a ravine, and then started up a zigzag path where the slope was very steep. They scrambled over rocks and fallen trees, crossed running brooks, and pushed through thickets, and at last, in perhaps half an hour, they came suddenly into an open space high up, where they could see a long distance away. They were tired, and sat on the grass to rest in the fresh air and bright sunshine, and Uncle Weary said, as they looked at the valley below: "You never saw anything better than that in Switzerland, did you, Archie?"



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"I never saw anything half so pretty anywhere," answered the boy.

"Oh, ain't it lovely! There's no place in the world like our dear old Vermont, is there?" burst from the enthusiastic Eddie.

It was a beautiful view. The long range of the Green Mountains on the opposite side of the valley looked blue and hazy in the distance. The soft, blue sky, the different shades of green in the meadows and fields, the bright glimpses of a crooked river, the red and yellow and brown farm-houses, and rich masses of foliage in the foreground made color and form for as lovely a landscape as could be found anywhere. They all appreciated it in their different ways, and then, as they were rested and their time was short, they soon followed Uncle Weary into the woods again. There was no underbrush to struggle through now, and before long they came to a grove of white-birch trees. They were young and slender, with their limbs and foliage high, and seemed very much alive as they stood, lithe and graceful, their heads nodding in the breeze, with the sunlight falling in patches on their glistening trunks.

"They look like girls dressed in white, all ready to march in the Fourth-of-July procession," said Uncle Weary.

"Yes, they do," echoed Eddie, "and they have



## A CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

green wreaths on their heads, like the ones girls always wear on the Fourth."

"We must ask them for some of their white dresses when we come back," said the young man, "if your knapsacks are not filled up by that time."

Eddie was sure he would have room to carry home a quantity of bark. He had never been able to get all he wanted, and there was nothing he enjoyed more on rainy days in the cave than making all sorts of trinkets and toys of the soft, velvety material.

"Well, here we are," said Uncle Weary, as they came in a moment more to an opening in the side of the mountain near a large rock.

"Why, that's a big woodchuck's hole, ain't it?" asked Eddie.

"It's the entrance to an underground cave, and there's where we get our 'Contribution to Science,'" said Uncle Weary—"that is, if you want to go in."

There was nothing Archie could think of that would delight him so much as this. He had heard a great deal about dark caves, and had longed to visit one. But Eddie was not so enthusiastic. He dreaded going down into that dark hole, where there might be bears or wolves, and yet he trusted Uncle Weary so completely that he was not really afraid, and made up his



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mind not to spoil the fun by holding back. So he smiled, and took the candle and matches that were given him, and followed the others.

The young man took the lead, going feet first into the opening, which was not more than a yard wide. Archie followed, and then Eddie. They slipped down an inclined plane of soft earth for some distance, and found themselves in a dark, cool, moist place, with only the faint sound of running water to break the silence. They lighted their candles now, and by their light could see rocky, rough walls above and around them, and a little, pebbly brook running crookedly through the floor of the cave. There were sharp stones sticking up everywhere in their path, and the boys saw now why they were told to wear their shoes.

After creeping through a winding passage, perhaps three feet high, they came to a larger space where they could stand upright, but where a big boulder seemed to block their way. Uncle Weary scrambled to the top of this and helped the boys up, and afterward they slipped down to the floor and crawled up an inclined rock, at the top of which they found another hole just big enough for a man to enter on all-fours.

By much tugging and pushing they managed to get through, and found themselves in a circular room about twelve feet across, with several



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flat stones lying about which served very well for seats. They sat down on these to rest for a moment, when Eddie said he felt a draught, and Archie asked: "Where does all this air come from? We are a long way from the entrance, and we are way underground, aren't we?"

Then Uncle Weary told them that the whole mountain was made of rocks which had been eaten into by water, forming many caves, some of them larger than this one; and that the air they felt came through cracks and crevices all around, and was rushing past to escape through the big chimney above them. The children looked up, but saw only black space. There seemed to be no roof at all.

"How high is the chimney, Uncle Weary?" asked Archie.

"Nobody knows yet. The cave has not been discovered long, and nobody has thought of a way to measure its height. That's what we're here for now. We'll make the fire-balloon tell us, and that will be our 'Contribution to Science.'"

The boys were still mystified, but they said nothing and helped to light the little balloon and hold out its sides until the heated air was ready to take it upward. At last it rose quickly, the young man paying out the string that was fastened to it. "Put out your lights,"



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he said, "but be sure you know where to find your matches."

The children obeyed quickly, and then watched the bright spot of color as it mounted higher and higher and showed the sides of the deep well, or chimney, at the bottom of which they were sitting. The little red balloon went up a great distance. They could see distinctly the smooth roof against which it rested for a moment, and then the light went out and the balloon came fluttering down.

The candles were lighted now, and Uncle Weary said: "Well, that was a great success, wasn't it?"

"But I don't see how the balloon measured the height," said Eddie.

"You're not so much of a Yankee as I thought you were. You ought to have guessed by this time," said Uncle Weary, showing them a knot in the twine he held in his hand. "I tied that when the balloon reached the top. Now I'll measure the string, and the question will be answered." By his two-foot rule the string was one hundred and five feet long. The chimney was much higher than any one had imagined.

Eddie was not sorry to get out to daylight as soon as possible. He could not understand why people wanted to burrow underground when they could stay in the beautiful sunshine and free air.



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He found something to interest him, however, before he reached the surface. As they crawled and crept back, they noticed on the sides of the cave several smooth spots which seemed like fresh plaster. They could make dents in it with their fingers, and they found names and dates written in the soft surface with some sharp instrument.

"Why, it's putty," said Eddie, taking a piece and moulding it in his hands.

"It's just like the modelling-clay we used in kindergarten!" exclaimed Archie.

"That's what it is," said Uncle Weary, also trying a piece. "You'd better take a lump of it to fool with on the next rainy day."

Archie took all he could carry in his knapsack, and Eddie filled his with long strips of birch-bark as soon as they came to the trees.

When they reached home they found Wag had cooked a nice dinner, and Jip was beside himself with joy when they appeared. "That was an awful nice conterbution, Uncle Weary," said Eddie; "but I would rather have our dear old Rattlesnake Den than all the underground caves in the world."

Archie was silent, but he liked to remember how he had sat on that stone way down in the earth, and seen the little burning globe go up, up, up, and disappear like a fairy's lamp. Indeed, he felt as though he had been in fairy-land, where



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the goblins and sprites lived, with all the little folks about whom his mother had read to him. He had heard them whispering and snickering, and felt their tiny fingers touching him during that moment of darkness when the light of the little balloon went out. *Alice in Wonderland* would never seem unreal to him again.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE WOODCHUCK'S HOLE

WHILE they were at breakfast the next morning a messenger came to the clearing with a telegram. Uncle Weary read it, and turning to the boys, told them he must go to a town some distance away, and would have to be gone, perhaps several days.

"I can't take you with me this time," he said, "but I'll let you go to the Stones' to stay till I get back. They've asked you to visit them, you know, and now's a good time. The berries are almost gone, and you will have a chance to fish for pickerel."

"May Wag go with us?" asked Archie.

"He'll have to look after things while I'm away," said Uncle Weary. "You can get your friend Thad Stires to stay with you, can't you, Wag?"

"Yes," said the boy, "he'll be glad of the chance," and then, following Uncle Weary into the cave, stood by him while he was packing his



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satchel, and added, rather shyly: "You don't care if Thad and me goes huntin' for the counterfeiter's cave, do ye?"

"What makes you think there's one 'round here?" asked the young man.

"Folks says there's a gang of counterfeiter's in this county, and like as not their hidin' in some cave in this mountain. There's lots on 'em that nobody 'round here has been into yet. We seen smoke comin' out of a crack in the ground one day last fall, and we think that came from their fire, and if we hunt 'round perhaps we can find their cave."

Uncle Weary laughed. "I guess all boys are pretty much alike," he said. "I looked for a counterfeiter's cave, too, when I was your age. If you go, you mustn't neglect the chores."

Wag promised to be faithful, and began to help the boys to prepare for their trip.

They were told to pack their knapsacks with a luncheon and a hen which insisted on setting. Mrs. Stone always wanted setting hens, and here was a good chance to send her one.

"You'd better eat your luncheon on the way," said Uncle Weary. "There's no hurry about your getting there, and Mrs. Stone may not like to have two hungry boys come in unexpectedly to dinner."

Wag cut some slices of bread and spread them



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thickly with butter, and brought from the cave half a dozen doughnuts and a piece of cheese. These were made into a parcel and put in Archie's bag. The hen was a small one, but she made a great noise when she was caught, and it was some time after her feet were tied and she was tucked into Eddie's bag before she stopped squawking.

Eddie was rather dismal about leaving Uncle Weary and the Den, even for a short time, and although Archie looked forward with pleasure to the pickerel-fishing, he thought, on the whole, there would be more fun in staying at home, and he felt sure he should miss Wag. So the boys were rather sober when they said good-bye and started with Jip for the Stones' farm.

They knew the way very well, and followed a path through the dim, cool woods for about an hour, and then came into a clearing on the mountain-side, where some sheep were nibbling the short grass which grew between the stones. The sun was shining brightly, and the sudden glare of light made them blink. Below them lay the lovely valley, which they always enjoyed looking at. A gentle breeze touched their faces, and the path up the mountain looked very attractive. So, under the influence of these bright surroundings, their spirits rose, and they began to sing and shout and race with Jip in their usual fashion.



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"Let's go up to the Hopper to eat our lunch," proposed Archie.

"All right," said Eddie. "Uncle Weary told us we needn't hurry. We don't have to get to Mr. Stone's for a long time."

The little dog always shared their moods, and seeing now that cheerfulness was the order of the day, ran barking ahead of his companions up the steep path. The slope was wooded again higher up, though the trees were smaller and more scattered than at the clearing.

The boys looked for a trap hidden in some weeds, but, finding nothing in it, they gathered some birch-bark, which Eddie stowed away in his bag, together with some acorns the squirrels had left. They were hungry now, and walked round the edge of the Hopper to find a good place to eat their luncheon in.

The Hopper was a deep hole in the ground, which no one could account for. It measured more than a hundred feet across and thirty feet in depth. It was perfectly round, and looked as though it might be the bowl of a huge giant which had been pressed firmly into the ground. The sides of this bowl were almost perpendicular, and were covered with grass and shrubs, and there were several large trees growing in the bottom, showing that the Hopper had been there a long time.



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The boys had never ventured to go down into the hole, although they had never been forbidden to do so, and they knew of several boys no older than themselves who had succeeded in scrambling out after sliding in. It had been a difficult and tiresome task, and was the subject of much bragging afterward.

Archie proposed now that they should eat their luncheon in the bottom of the Hopper. He had always wanted to explore the place, and to-day seemed an excellent opportunity. He was anxious to show those boastful boys that he could do what they had done. But Eddie objected strongly, insisting that there might be danger in the venture, and it would be sure to take too much time.

While they were arguing about it, the question was settled for them by Jip, who plunged down the side of the Hopper in pursuit of a woodchuck. Eddie tried to catch the dog as he rushed by, but in doing so lost his balance, and before he knew what was happening rolled over and over and finally landed with Jip on the soft grass on the floor of the hole. Archie had tried to catch Eddie when he saw him going, but only succeeded in pushing him in, and followed headlong himself.

All three were bruised and breathless but not seriously hurt, and Jip lost no time in chasing the woodchuck into a clump of bushes. The boys



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jumped up and followed the dog, almost as much excited as he. They found him barking and digging with his paws at the edge of a stone which was half hidden by an alder-bush.

"Let's lift the stone up," said Eddie. "The woodchuck's hole is under it, I guess."

He found a strong stick, which he used for a lever, and, tugging with all their might, they were able to lift the stone, although it was almost too large and heavy for their strength.

As Eddie had guessed, they found a cavity beneath it. "There," said the boy, "What did I tell you? That's his hole. Go in and get him, Jip!"

With an excited yelp the dog obeyed, but to the surprise of all three he went through a mass of decayed leaves and loose stones, almost disappearing.

"Why, I never saw a woodchuck's hole so deep," said Eddie, catching Jip's foot, which was all that was in sight, and trying to pull him out. Jip's struggles drew the boy into the hole, when to his dismay he began to sink out of sight. He screamed for help, and Archie reached for his hand; but in an instant, he never knew how, he was on the top of his companion and slipping and sliding down an inclined plane—his weight helping to push the others along. There was nothing to hold on by, and no time to think of doing so,



## THE WOODCHUCK'S HOLE

as they went on and on—a long distance it seemed to the boys, though it was not really more than twenty feet.

The adventures of *Alice in Wonderland* flashed through Archie's mind now, and he thought he and Eddie were going through the earth, just as the little girl had done in the story, and wondered when he should see the rabbit.

It was probably only a few seconds after they had entered this smooth flue, or crevice, in the rock before they felt themselves tumbling head over heels through space and landed in a heap on a soft bed of sand, stunned by the fall and choked by the dust which clung to the sides of the crevice.

Eddie was the first to find his voice, and began to scream with terror and pain. Jip joined in with a chorus of yelps, but Archie was silent, though his heart thumped painfully. It was so dark and so still about them! Where were they? A long distance underground, in some sort of cave. That much was certain. His sharp ears detected a faint sound near them. He reached out for Jip and held his mouth shut, while he called out to his companion: "Stop crying, Eddie, and listen. What's that noise?"



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE COUNTERFEITERS' DEN

EDDIE'S cries stopped at once, and the deathly stillness was broken only by the gentle trickle of water quite near them. This added to the poor little boy's fright, and he screamed: "Oh, we'll be drowned if we stir! What shall we do?"

"Perhaps if we make as much noise as we can some one will hear us," said Archie.

Eddie agreed, and they began hallooing and shouting, and Jip barked and whined by turns. It was a terrible din, for the echoes above and around them multiplied the sounds and made them almost deafening.

After awhile they became hoarse and stopped for breath, and Archie said: "It's no use. Nobody comes by the Hopper, and if they did they couldn't hear us, I'm afraid."

"Oh, it's so dark!" moaned Eddie. "We'll never get out of this dreadful place! We'll die here!"



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"No, we won't," said Archie, stoutly. "I just know we'll think of some way to get out after awhile. Anyway, Uncle Weary will look for us."

"But he's gone away, you know," said Eddie.

"Well, we've got enough to eat to keep us alive for several days," said Archie.

"This place isn't anywhere near the road to Stone's farm," argued Eddie. "Besides, Uncle Weary won't be home, perhaps for a week."

"I think he'll be back sooner," said Archie, hopefully, "and then he'll get a lot of people to hunt for us. We'll be the lost children. My mother read me a story of two boys that were lost in the woods, and a great many people looked for them all night, and at last they found them in a sheep-pen all curled up with the sheep."

"But there was some chance for them; they were on top of the earth," said Eddie, "and we are buried way down in the ground where nobody can hear or see us again."

His pitiful cries began again, and Jip crept into his arms, whimpering.

"If we could only see where we are," said Archie. "I wish we had some matches."

"Oh, I think I've got some in my pocket," cried Eddie, joyfully. "I put 'em there to have 'em handy when I light the fires. Yes, here's a whole box of 'em."



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"Oh, light one, quick!" cried Archie.

Eddie scratched a match on his trousers, but he was too nervous, and it broke off in his fingers and the flame went out. He was more careful on the second trial, and they were able to look about them by this dim, little light. They found they were in a room which seemed large, with irregular, rocky walls and a flat, sandy floor. They saw at a glance that the place had been occupied. Not far from them were two small, rough benches, on which lay a roll of blankets and several old garments.

"Oh, there's a lantern!" shrieked Eddie. "Get it, quick, Archie!"

It was one of the old-fashioned sort, such as farmers use, with a candle in it. Eddie's nimble fingers soon opened its door and applied a freshly lighted match to the wick.

It was such an immense relief to be able to see once more that the little fellows danced about and shouted for joy and forgot for a moment all other troubles.

Jip ran over to a wooden chopping-bowl which had been sunk in a clay bank near the wall and began lapping the water which trickled into it, making the sound which had frightened Eddie.

"Why, it's a spring of nice, cold water!" exclaimed the boy, lying down on his stomach to share a drink with the little dog.



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Archie found a rusty tin cup on the bench, and drank, too. Then they washed their faces and hands and felt much refreshed.

They had been so frightened by their fall into the cave that they did not realize at first how much they were scratched and bruised by the rough flue during their passage through it. But now they began to suffer a good deal of pain, and found their faces and hands and feet had a number of cuts, while several bumps began to appear on their heads.

Their hurts were a blessing to the little fellows, for they gave them something to think of besides the terror of their situation. They used the cold water freely to bathe their scratches, and as they had fortunately escaped broken bones and sprains, in a short time they felt much easier, and suddenly realized that they were very hungry.

Eddie took out the lunch and laid it on one of the benches. There was only enough for two hungry boys for one meal. Archie began dividing it. "We must save half of it for to-morrow," he said. "That's the way they do when they're shipwrecked and they don't know how long they'll have to be on the water."

Eddie saw the wisdom of this precaution, and wrapped four slices of bread and butter and two doughnuts in a piece of paper and put the package safely away in his knapsack, to make sure he



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would not be tempted to eat their future supply, as he might if it were in sight.

They felt much better after the meal—though far from satisfied—and began to look around them. The light from their one little candle did not go far, and the place seemed full of gloom and mystery. They could not judge at all of its size or shape from the spot where they stood.

Their first thought now was to look for some opening through which they might escape. Archie carried the lantern and led the way as they commenced a circuit of the walls. They had not gone far before they found that the little white spots they had taken for bits of limestone were really candles—a dozen or more—fastened on pieces of tin which were stuck into crevices. They were partly burned, so it was easy to light them, and then the boys could see about them quite plainly.

The room was irregular in shape, in some places much wider than in others, with several cavities in the rock sides, which Eddie called “cubby-holes.” One of these, on a level with the floor, was the size and shape of an old-fashioned fireplace. It had been used as one, as the blackened sides and a heap of ashes showed.

There was a draught of air inward here, and the boys concluded that the smoke was carried to the surface through some crack or crevice in



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the stone, perhaps like the one they had fallen through. There was a small pile of wood near the fireplace and several queer-looking pots and pans on the hearth.

The little boys continued their rounds, and were soon convinced that there was no door or opening in the sides of the cave. They would have to manage to get out by way of the passage through which they had fallen.

They were talking this over when a whirring noise began overhead, and several black objects rushed past them. Archie was so frightened that he sat down in the sand and, with wide-open eyes, began screaming.

"Don't be scared!" said Eddie. "It's only bats. They're always in caves. They won't hurt us. We can kill 'em if they bother us any more."

As soon as Eddie spoke, Archie was very much ashamed of his cowardice. He jumped up, saying: "They just scared me some at first, they came so suddenly. But I'm not afraid of bats. How can we kill 'em?"

"They've gone back to their hiding-places, I guess," said Eddie, looking above them.

"I wonder how high the roof of the cave is?" said Archie. "It must go way up in some places, for we can't see it at all."

"It must be like the one we went into with Uncle Weary," said Eddie. "You know he said



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there were lots of caves like that in the mountain. But I don't understand how we got into this one."

"Isn't this the place?" said Archie, looking up into what seemed a dark opening about six feet from the floor at the top of a "cubby-hole."

"I believe it is!" said Eddie, excitedly. "Look at those dents in the sand where we fell. Now, if I only had a hammer and nails I could make a ladder of those sticks of wood, and we could get up to the hole and crawl out."

"Let's look around. Perhaps we can find some," exclaimed Archie, hopefully.

They searched through a heap of rubbish containing tin cans, old clothes, and all sorts of worthless trash, but there was nothing that could be used for a hammer, and no nails. In one of the alcoves near the fireplace were two chests, but both of them were securely locked, and no key could be found.

Eddie was entirely discouraged at this and began to cry. "We'll never get out! We'll have to stay here till we starve and die!" he sobbed.

"I'm not going to give up yet," said Archie. "Folks have been here and brought all these things. Perhaps they'll come again. They may be here any minute."

"How could they get in?" asked Eddie. "They'd have to drop down from the roof or tumble through a hole as we did."



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"We don't know," said Archie. "Perhaps they have a rope-ladder or something."

"I think I'd be afraid to see any one coming that way," said Eddie, shivering.

"What a coward you are!" exclaimed Archie. "I'd be glad to see anybody, even if it was pirates, that would help us out of this place."

"Well, I'm hungry and cold," said Eddie, dolefully.

"Let's play something to make us warm," said Archie, turning a somersault on the floor.

Eddie followed his example, and afterward they raced about playing tag and making Jip hunt for them in the "cubby-holes." They were soon warm enough with this exercise, and went to the spring to drink.

The clay of the bank in which the wooden bowl was imbedded was damp and smooth to the touch. Eddie picked up a piece of it and began to press and mould it with his fingers. "Why, it's that kindergarten clay!" exclaimed Eddie.

"Yes, it is," said Archie, eagerly, as he rolled a lump of the clay into a ball. "Now we can have fun," he went on. "I'll show you how to do a lot of things."

They played with the fascinating material for more than an hour. Archie's task as teacher was soon over, for Eddie learned quickly, and in a short time could do better work than his com-



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panion. They made heads of dogs and horses and images of men and boys with arms and legs in various attitudes. They manufactured miniature dishes and cooking utensils, and played with the clay in all sorts of ways, when they suddenly became aware that they were again cold and hungry, and, in addition to these discomforts, they had made their clothing wet by frequently washing their sticky hands in the tiny stream which carried the water from the bowl into a crack in the floor, which was rocky in this spot.

"Let's have a fire," said Archie.

"Of course. Why haven't we thought of that before?" returned Eddie, running to the rubbish heap. He found there some bits of newspapers and a pine board, which he split into kindlings with his jack-knife, and had a cheerful flame blazing when Archie brought some sticks of dry maple wood to add to the fire. The draught seemed excellent, for the smoke went straight up and disappeared as through an ordinary chimney.

"Oh, how *good* it seems!" said Eddie, holding out his cold, red hands to the flame. "I believe I'd rather be hungry than cold."

Archie agreed on this point, and they both felt a greater sense of comfort than they had known since their misfortune as they sat on the floor and warmed their chilled bodies and dried their damp clothes.



## CHAPTER XX

### JIP FINDS A SUPPER

“**W**HAT’S the matter with Jip?” asked Archie, after awhile.

The dog was barking and growling by turns, and seemed to be tugging at some object near one of the benches. Eddie ran to see what was the matter, and came back carrying Archie’s knapsack.

“He was trying to get at the chicken,” he said. “He’s smarter than we are, for we forgot all about it.”

“Oh, isn’t that good!” said Archie, laughing, as he took the hen from the bag. “Now we can have a good supper, if we only can find something to cook it in.”

“We can roast it in the ashes, if we can’t do anything better,” said Eddie. “But perhaps we can find a pot or something that will do.”

He wrung the chicken’s neck while he was talking, and Archie picked off its feathers and cut it up with his sharp knife, giving Jip the



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head and other stray bits, while Eddie searched for a kettle that would hold water. There were several cracked iron pots and pans lying on the rubbish-heap, and one small one, more rusty than the others, which he thought might be sound. He scoured it well with ashes and sand, afterward washing it at the spring. He then put in it about two quarts of water, and found to his delight that it did not leak. As soon as the water was boiling the chicken was put into it, and the three sat down to wait. Eddie now began to feel more at home and free from foreboding. The fire and the steaming pot gave him a sense of "hominess." He somehow felt that, if he could cook and have Jip by his side enjoying the warmth of the crackling blaze, there must be hope for them. Besides, Archie's steady coolness and cheerfulness made him sure that some way for their deliverance would be thought of. A girl cousin had once taught him to crochet little mats. He was very fond of doing this when he was sure he would not be laughed at, and always carried a crochet-needle and ball of twine in his pocket. He took them out now and began to shape a little mat, almost forgetting his hunger in the pleasure of his occupation.

Archie roamed about the cave, searching through the "cubby-holes" for new treasures, and looking over the heap of rubbish once more



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to see if he could find materials and tools for making a ladder. There were plenty of sticks, but all of them were of short lengths, and there was nothing in the shape of tools except an old pair of pincers. There was a coil of rusty wire, and Eddie said the pincers had been used to break off lengths of it.

The chicken was now bubbling and boiling in the pot, filling the cave with an odor delicious to the hungry boys, and Eddie said: "I wonder if our old hen isn't most done. I wish I had a fork to try it."

"Couldn't you make one out of this wire?" suggested Archie.

"Perhaps so," said Eddie; and, throwing down his crochet-work, he took up the pincers and broke off a short bit of wire. He then made the blunt end red-hot in the coals and hammered it to a point with a stone, using the iron clamp of a chest as an anvil. With this implement he stabbed the chicken, and, though the meat was still pretty tough, he thought they might begin eating. He fished out a joint for himself and one for Archie, and Jip had the bones for his share. They agreed that they must keep the rest for the next meals.

Eddie's watch had been broken by his fall into the cave, but fortunately Archie's was still going, and by this they found it was only four o'clock.



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They felt much better and stronger after their meal, and went to work heartily on their ladder. Eddie thought the short pieces might be spliced together by the wire, making sufficiently strong sides for the ladder. To make these sides long enough was their chief trouble, for it was easy, they thought, to fasten on the rounds.

For an hour the brave little fellows toiled, and at last had made a clumsy ladder, which they leaned against the wall. But they tried in vain to climb it. It fell to pieces at every attempt, and at last they were obliged to give it up. Eddie was discouraged, and sat by the fire with tears streaming down his face.

"Don't cry, Eddie," said Archie. "We can't think of anything if you do that. Let's play something for a while."

"Well," said Eddie, wiping his eyes and trying to be brave, too, "what shall we do? I wish we had a checker-board."

"Can't we make one?" said Archie.

"I don't know. Perhaps so," said Eddie, interested at once. "We'll have to get a big, smooth board and mark it off in squares."

They found that the top of a soap-box would do for this purpose. Eddie used his knife to make the squares, and then heated the end of the iron stick they had used for a poker and scorched the alternate squares, making a very re-



## JIP FINDS A SUPPER

spectable checker-board. They tried little stones for the "men," but these were not flat enough, and Eddie suggested making them of clay and drying them before the fire.

This idea was carried out very successfully by making up two shapes, one square and the other round, and at last they were ready. They sat on the sandy floor, with the soap-box between them, and played several games. Both of them seemed interested, and for a while they could imagine they were at home in Rattlesnake Den waiting for Uncle Weary to come in.

But suddenly in the midst of a game Eddie burst into sobs, and, laying his head down on the box, cried as though his heart would break. "I can't help it, Archie," he said, at last, despairingly. "I just know we'll never get out. We'll die here. I shall never see Uncle Weary again."

Archie said nothing. His stout little spirit was sorely beset with fears and misgivings, but he came of a race of fighters, who never give up beaten. He took Jip in his arms and sat staring into the fire, trying steadily to think of some way to make the ladder. He felt sure there was no other way of escape.

After awhile he noticed that Eddie's sobs had stopped, and, looking round, saw that he was sleeping. His curly head was resting on his arm,



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and his pale, tear-stained face looked very sad and forlorn.

Archie took one of the old blankets from the bench and threw it over the sleeping boy, tucking it around him as well as he could, and then, after putting some more wood on the fire, blew out all but one of the candles, rolled himself in another blanket, and laid down by his companion. Jip crawled in between them, as usual, and soon went to sleep, leaving Archie with wide-open eyes desperately fighting a sense of loneliness and desolation. He thought of his brave, devoted father, of his sweet, loving mother, and of their anxiety and distress if they could even dream of his situation.

Then he began to think of the bats again, and shivered with horror at the idea that they might swoop down upon him as he lay there in the dim light. He pulled the blanket over his head for protection, and then, in the darkness and silence, allowed the tears to come at last.

It was a great relief, and the poor little man cried himself to sleep.



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE LADDER

JIP was ill in the night. He wakened Eddie by whining and moving about restlessly, and finally put his nose against the little boy's cheek.

Archie wakened, too, and the boys soon saw that the dog had eaten something that disagreed with him. They made him lie on a blanket before the fire, which they brightened with more wood, and Archie lighted several candles near them. Jip seemed to feel better soon, so the boys rolled themselves in blankets and lay down again on their hard beds for another nap.

They slept several hours after this, and then found, by Archie's watch, that it was six o'clock. They jumped up, feeling entirely rested, and for an instant did not know where they were. But Jip's silent little form by the burned-out fire, and the light of one candle showing them the dark walls, made them realize their situation. They hastened to light the fire and several candles, and then washed their faces and hands at the spring.



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Getting breakfast was a very simple affair. Eddie fished several pieces of chicken from the pot, which they ate with the remaining bread and butter and a few acorns. There was enough chicken left for another meal, and, though they were still hungry, they put this carefully away, covering the pot with a board so that Jip could not get at it.

But the little dog had no appetite, even for the nice breakfast of chicken-bones Eddie brought him. He lifted his head languidly when his name was called, and then laid it down again and closed his eyes.

Eddie was alarmed. He took the dog in his arms and, putting his hand on his nose, called out to Archie: "Oh, he's awful sick! His nose is warm, and that's a sure sign. What shall we do for him?"

Archie was quite helpless and could not suggest anything, but Eddie immediately remembered that white lye was good for indigestion. He always had to take it when he was ill. He knew how to make it, as he had watched the process many times. He decided to try it for Jip. So he laid the little dog carefully in Archie's arms and ran for the tin cup. He filled this half full of water, added a small handful of ashes, and set it over some coals to boil. Afterward it was left to cool and settle.



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"I'm afraid he won't take it," said Archie, dubiously.

"We'll have to put it in a bottle and pour it down his throat, I expect, just as Uncle Weary used to give medicine to Staggers," said Eddie.

There were plenty of beer bottles on the rubbish-heap. Eddie selected one of the smallest of these and put into it several spoonfuls of the clear liquid. He knew that animals will not take medicine willingly, and expected to have a struggle with Jip to force the bottle into his mouth. But the poor little dog seemed to be more dead than alive, and the boys had no trouble in pouring the lye down his throat.

They fancied he seemed to feel better soon after this. He lay on his blanket before the fire, and once or twice feebly wagged his tail to show the boys he appreciated what they had done for him. Eddie said he was sure Jip would be well now, and they left him sleeping while they searched the rubbish-heap again, in the hope of finding something they could use for a ladder.

"What's this?" said Archie, pulling out a blackened tin dish.

"It looks like a glue-pot," said Eddie.

"Can't we fasten the ladder together with glue?" asked Archie.

"No, 'course not," said Eddie. "It wouldn't hold together a minute. But let's stop and play a



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little. Perhaps we can make something with that paper we found yesterday."

He put some water on the dry pieces of glue and set the basin on some coals, and Archie brought him a bundle of variously colored tissue-paper which they had found in the pocket of one of the old coats.

"Let's make a kite," said Eddie, spreading the crumpled sheets smoothly on a bench.

"You can't fly a kite in a cave," protested Archie.

"I believe we could over there by the spring," said Eddie. "Don't you remember what a strong draught there is there where the roof is so high?"

"But we haven't any string to fly a kite with," objected Archie.

"Yes," returned Eddie, eagerly. "We can unravel my crochet-work and use the cord."

Archie agreed to this, and began unravelling the little mat, while Eddie made the frame for a small kite by gluing together some slender sticks in the form of a cross. He then covered the frame with some pink tissue-paper, using the glue to fasten it firmly in place. He made a tail of string and twisted bits of paper, fastened the cord in the proper place, and it was ready.

But Eddie was mistaken. The draught was not strong enough to take up the tiny kite. It constantly fell when they tried to send it upward.



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"I wish we could make a fire-balloon, like the one Uncle Weary sent up in the cave," said Archie.

"I think I could make one," said Eddie.  
"There isn't much to 'em, you know."

"But we have no paraffine to light it with," said Archie.

"We could fix that easy enough," said Eddie.  
"We could melt a candle and soak a rag with the tallow. That would burn all right."

Eddie had a great deal of ingenuity and invention, and after awhile had brought together materials which would answer very well for his purpose. He cut off a piece of wire and bent it into a circle about four inches across. He then made a bag of white tissue-paper shaped like a large pear, joining the sides together with glue, and fastening the wire ring in the same way to the small, open mouth of the bag. He melted a candle in the tin cup, and soaked an old, soft cotton rag in the grease, made it into a loose ball, and hung it with wires below the bag.

He remembered very well how Uncle Weary had managed the fire-balloon when they measured the height of the other cave; so he fastened the cord to his home-made affair, and, taking it to the spot where the draught seemed strongest, lighted his grease-ball, and he and Archie held the bal-



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loon very carefully directly over the flame. The heat and smoke filled the light paper bag after a moment or two, and as soon as they let it go it sailed away very quickly, and by its tiny light the boys saw a high vault above them, with rocky sides, very much like the one they had visited with Uncle Weary.

"What's that?" asked Archie, pointing to the side.

"It seems to be a rope," said Eddie.

"Yes, that's what it is," chimed in Archie, joyfully. "Now we can get out. That's where the folks come and go."

"But how?" queried Eddie.

"I don't know yet; but we'll manage some way to get up to that rope, and I know we can climb by that to the opening where the folks that come here get in and out."

The little balloon was burned out now, leaving the vault above them as dark as before, and they could no longer see the rope. They made another balloon as quickly as possible, and sent it upward in great excitement and hopefulness. When it reached the level of the hanging rope, Eddie was able to hold it there long enough for them to see distinctly a black hole in the wall, perhaps three feet across, with the rope dangling from it. The boys were at once confirmed in their belief that this was an entrance to the cave, and if they



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could only make a ladder their escape was certain.

"Let's try again," said Archie.

"It's no use," answered Eddie. "The wire won't hold."

"Can't you make some nails out of the wire?" asked Archie.

"No," said Eddie. "But I'll tell you what I can do. I wonder I didn't think of that before. I can burn holes through the wood with a piece of hot iron, and then splice the sticks together with those bolts we saw on the rubbish-heap."

Archie did not understand about bolts, and had no clear idea of Eddie's plan. But he believed he could do almost anything with his hands, so he hastened to collect the sticks of wood for the ladder, while Eddie put the round piece of iron they had been using into the fire to heat. When it was red-hot he made a hole about an inch in diameter in the ends of each length of wood. It was hard work, and it was many hours before their task was finished.

They had eaten their last bit of food, and were hungry and almost faint when at last the two sides of the ladder were ready for the rounds. The bolts worked very well, and made the sides strong enough, though rather "wobbly."

After resting a little while, they made the rounds by short lengths of wood laid on the pro-



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jecting bolts, twisting wire firmly around them to keep them in place.

It was a very awkward and clumsy ladder, but it looked beautiful to the two little prisoners, and as they placed it against the wall their grimy faces beamed with delight.

Eddie tried it first. It creaked and swayed under his weight, and they were afraid it would break, but he went up and down several times until he could get the "hang of it," as he said, and was sure it would do.

It reached to within a foot of the opening. The little boy stood on its top round and peered into the darkness. A strong draught struck him, which he was sure came from outside. By the light of his lantern he saw that the dangling rope was the end of a large coil which lay near the edge of the opening, and guessed that it was used to raise and lower the chests and other articles in the cave. The boys held a consultation, and decided that Archie should go up first and explore, and that Eddie and Jip would follow if the report was favorable.

Archie took the lighted lantern and half a dozen bits of candles, with the precious box of matches, and slowly climbed the ladder. Then he lighted a candle and stuck it in a crevice near the opening, as much protected as possible from the draught, and placed another farther on as



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soon as he reached a point where he could no longer see the first one. His object in placing the candles in this way was to show the way back, if he should be lost, or if anything happened to the lantern.

He crawled through a short tunnel-like passage on his hands and knees over rough stones and damp clay, with water often dripping on his back, until he came to a more open space where he could stand erect. He saw, by the light of his lantern, that he was now in a room much larger than the one they had been staying in. It was narrow and long, like a hall, and was very crooked, with many winding turns. He came to the end of it at last, and crawled through a small hole in the wall into a larger room, then through another hall-like passage and up a steep slope. The draught he had been feeling in his face grew stronger and fresher now, and he felt sure, as he scrambled and stumbled along, that he was on the right track at last.

All the time his guide had been many footprints on the sand and clay floors of the various rooms, showing him the direction to take.

His hand trembled with excitement as he lighted his last candle, and when he turned round he was sure he saw a faint ray of daylight not far away.

He had been many hours underground, in ter-



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rible anxiety and suspense. Now that he was sure of escape, his excited nerves gave way, and he sat down and laughed and cried hysterically.

Eddie heard him faintly, and began shouting anxiously to know what was the matter. The boys were too far apart to hear each other's words, but Archie hastened back to the ladder, exclaiming: "Oh, I've found the way out! Come along with Jip, quick!"

Eddie was overjoyed and began to laugh and cry, too, as he ran to get the little dog. The boys expected to have no trouble in making Jip climb the ladder. He had been trained to do more difficult feats than that. But, much to their surprise, they could not prevail on the little fellow to take a step. He seemed too weak to stand, when Eddie tried to urge him forward.

"You see, he's too sick to walk. How shall we ever get him up the ladder?" said Eddie, in distress.

"We'll *have* to do it some way," said Archie.

It never occurred to either of them to desert their little companion, and at last, after much consultation, they decided to tie him securely in a blanket, fasten the rope to this, and together pull him up the wall to the opening.

Their hands were almost blistered by the coarse rope, but they landed their precious bundle safely. Jip was too weak to move, and Eddie carried



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him, slowly and cautiously, through all the passages and rooms.

They had one more difficulty in climbing the slope, but Eddie ran back for the rope, and, tying it again to the bundle, they succeeded in pulling Jip up the slippery surface, and in another instant they were standing in the free, open air, with grass under their feet and trees and shrubs about them.

Looking up, they saw a bright moon in the sky which made a soft light almost as clear as day.

"Oh, ain't it lovely!" began Eddie. Then, looking round, he saw Archie looking dazed and weak and sinking down on the grass, where he at once went into a sound sleep.

Eddie looked at his watch and found it was only eleven o'clock. He concluded it was best for them all to sleep until morning; so he spread the blanket over the three and knew nothing more until, at four o'clock, he was awakened by voices near him.

Opening his eyes, he saw Wag and Thad looking down on them through the dim morning light, and old Staggers looming up behind them.

"Why, where did you come from?" exclaimed Eddie, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"I'd better ask you that question," returned Wag. "What made ye leave Stone's so early in the mornin'?"



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"We haven't been there," said Eddie.

"Not been there!" echoed the big boy.  
"Then where have ye been the last two days?"

"We fell into a cave from a hole in the bottom of the Hopper, and we got out through that one," pointing to an opening behind them.

"Why, that beats the Dutch!" cried Wag, staring with open mouth at Eddie.

"What kind of a cave was it?" asked Thad.

"Somebody had lived there. We used their blankets and dishes and had a fire in their fireplace," said the little boy.

"That's the counterfeiter's cave!" exclaimed Wag, excitedly. "Me and Thad was just lookin' for it, and I don't see how on earth we missed that hole."

"That bush there pretty nigh hid it," said Thad.

"But tell us what else there was in the cave."

"There were some chests," said Eddie; "but we couldn't open 'em."

"There's where they kept their bogus money!" exclaimed Thad, slapping his knee. "We'd better go right in and get it."

But Wag thought the little boys should be cared for at once; afterward, the cave could be explored at their leisure. So, after trying in vain to waken Archie, Thad mounted Stagers with the sleeping boy in front of him, Wag carried



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Jip, and they all started for the Den, which was not very far away.

Uncle Weary was there. He had returned sooner than he had expected, on an early morning train, and was getting breakfast.

Archie wakened now, though he still seemed dazed. But both boys were more like themselves as soon as they were washed and dressed in clean clothes and had eaten of the good food which was soon ready.

Uncle Weary was silent while they told their story. After they had finished, he said: "Well, you had a pretty tough time, but you showed a good deal of courage and ingenuity. I guess Archie 'll make a first-rate soldier, after all."



## CHAPTER XXII

### ON THE ROAD

"**B**OYS, let's have a council of war. I want your advice," said Uncle Weary, a few evenings later.

The children came wonderingly at Uncle Weary's call. To be asked for their opinion was a new experience. "Sit down by the fire and we'll have a powwow, as the Indians do," the young man went on.

The boys obeyed. They were puzzled but much pleased, and stretched their bare feet toward the flame, the warmth of which was very agreeable.

After a few moments of silence the young man said, abruptly: "I have found that some people in the village are saying I stole you. Now the question is, what shall we do about it? Shall I take you home, or will you go with me somewhere else?"

"*I* don't want to go home," said Archie, quickly.



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"I don't, *either*," echoed Eddie, emphatically. "I don't see why folks tell such dreadful stories. I wish we could stay right here."

"That's out of the question," said Uncle Weary, decidedly. "We must make up our minds to-night and leave here as soon as possible."

"Why do we have to pay any attention to that story," said Archie. "We can tell people it isn't true."

"They wouldn't believe us, and some one would be sure to make us a lot of trouble."

"Where can we go?" asked Archie.

"I have a cousin living on a farm south of here, beyond Jericho. There's a summer hotel in the village and plenty of blackberries all around there. We might do a good business. What do you say to going there?"

"How long will it take us?" asked Eddie.

"About two days and nights, I guess—with old Staggers."

"I think that would be fine," said Archie, "and we'd better start to-morrow."

"Do you think so, too, Eddie?" said the young man.

"Yes," said the little boy, rather hesitatingly, looking around at the familiar objects that he was so fond of.

"We'd have to leave all these things pretty



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soon, anyway, sonny," said Uncle Weary, gently. "We'll carry along Jip and the kitten. Wag owns the fawn, you know, and he'll take the pig and chickens and rabbits."

"I wish we could take Wag," said the boy.

"You don't wish that more than he does. I told him to-day we were going soon, and he was all broken up over it. He's a good-hearted chap, and I hate to leave him myself."

"We can't get ready to start to-morrow, can we?" asked Eddie.

"We could start early in the morning before light, and I think we'd better. I thought you'd vote to go, and so I've been getting ready to-day."

"Can't we say good-bye to Mrs. Taggart and Em and Wag and the Stones?" asked the little boy, tearfully.

"What's the use of making yourself miserable? It's much better not to say good-bye. That's one reason for starting right off, when you can't see things to cry over 'em. I've told Wag, if he came in the morning and found us gone, to take the stock away. Now you'd better go to bed and get some sleep before we start."

They were wakened some time before daylight by their guardian, who told them to put on their stockings, shoes, and jackets. They did this as well as they could by the light of the lantern which he was dodging round with, and then saw,



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dimly, that Stagers was harnessed to the little wagon, which had a cover made from the awning fastened over some bent saplings. The old horse was white again, the stain having been taken off, and looked large and ghostly to the little fellows, and everything about them seemed most unreal and dreamlike.

But there was no time to think much about it, for Uncle Weary said, briskly, "Get in, boys. Cuddle down in the straw and take another nap." The wagon was well filled with boxes and bundles and cooking utensils, but they contrived to find space for their little bodies, and, though they did not go to sleep at first, they kept still while the old horse walked slowly away from Rattlesnake Den down the hill to the high-road.

After awhile the boys fell asleep, and knew nothing more until they opened their eyes in broad daylight in a country they had never seen before. Stagers was going along at a slow pace, and Uncle Weary was plodding by his side.

The children sat up, rubbing their sleepy eyes, and Eddie stuck out his curly head.

"Hullo, sonny! You're awake, are you?" said the young man, smiling.

"Yes," said the boy. "We're both awake. Where are we?"

"Well, we're on the road to Jericho. You know there's where the good man fell among



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thieves, but I guess we won't," he added, seeing the troubled look on the boy's face.

They were not long in reaching a little running brook, such as one finds everywhere in New England, and they stopped at its edge on a grassy spot. The harness was taken off, and the faithful old horse well watered and fed. Eddie quickly built a little fire in a sheltered place, and Archie made the coffee and cooked some bacon in a small frying-pan. There was plenty of bread and butter and some bananas, and the boys ate heartily, with real country appetites.

They were now in a valley, with a mountain rising close on one side of them, while on the other were meadows and streams between them and the more distant range.

"I think I'll go up into those pine woods," said the young man after breakfast. "Staggers and I need a nap."

"Didn't you sleep any?" asked Eddie.

"How could I sleep and drive, too?" said Uncle Weary, answering the question in New England fashion. "But I'll make up for it to-day," he added, cheerfully.

He harnessed Staggers to the wagon, and they plunged into the dark forest, following an abandoned road which was in very bad condition.

"Have you ever been here before?" asked Eddie, anxiously.



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“Don’t you worry, sonny. I know all about pine woods and old roads. This will take us somewhere.”

The mountain was very steep in places, and the road so washed by rains that it was difficult to get the wagon along. But after awhile, by dint of much urging, they succeeded in reaching a small house almost covered by weeds and briers. Uncle Weary drove into the yard, and, finding the place deserted, he concluded to make his camp there for the day. He took off the harness and turned the horse loose to feed on some sweet orchard grass, and then, telling the boys they might do as they pleased, but not to go out of sight, he threw himself on a blanket under an old apple-tree and fell at once into a heavy sleep.

The little boys were eager to enjoy a whole day devoted to play, and began at once to explore the old house and barn. After that they climbed apple-trees and hunted for chipmunks, and finally settled down to playing in the tiny brook—building a dam which made a little lake, in which they built an island and a bridge connecting it with the mainland.

They were so busy and interested that the hours slipped away unnoticed, and they did not know it was noon until Uncle Weary stood by them looking down at their work. He was pale, and spoke in a husky voice when he told them to get



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their dinner from the wagon. He then walked slowly back to his resting-place under the apple-tree.

It was so unusual for him to be silent and indifferent to them, to have no jokes or cheerful comment for anything new they were doing, that the boys looked at each other in astonishment, and Eddie said, anxiously: "Are you sick, Uncle Weary?"

The young man did not answer at first, but said, presently: "I don't feel very well, but I guess I'll be all right when I get my sleep out."

He ate very little luncheon, but drank feverishly of the cold water, and soon went to sleep again.

The boys made up for his loss of appetite by eating their portions and his, too, and then spent the afternoon in manufacturing tiny cities and towns round their miniature lake. When the sun set behind the mountain and the air grew chilly, their guardian woke and gave them directions to light a fire and put on the iron pot for their usual stew. For this they found, in the box fastened to the back of the wagon, a dressed rabbit, a piece of pork, vegetables, and crusts of bread. After the dinner the dishes were washed in the brook and packed away in the wagon by the boys, and then they sat on the ground, tired



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and sleepy, asking no questions and waiting trustingly for orders.

Presently Uncle Weary told them to go to bed in the wagon, and they obeyed willingly, dropping to sleep at once. The young man sat by the fire until midnight, when he lighted a lantern to find Staggers, who was still eating and resting by turns, put the harness on the old horse, and fastened him to the wagon. It was a difficult task to lead him over the uneven and sidling road; but finally they reached the main thoroughfare in the valley, when the young man took his seat in the wagon and drove steadily until daylight.

It was the last of August, but there had been no sunshine for three days, and the air was damp and chilly. By six o'clock a slow, drizzling rain began.

"This 'll never do," said Uncle Weary, after they had ridden for about half an hour. "Staggers won't stand it very long. We must find a shelter for him and go into camp till it clears up."

Soon after this they turned into a lane which seemed to lead across the valley at right angles to the main road. "We'll take our chances of finding something along here," said Uncle Weary, looking to the right and left for some shelter such as he wanted.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE HAY-BARN

PRESENTLY they drove up to a small barn a few feet from the road. Back of it was a meadow which seemed to have been mowed recently, as the grass in it was short and green.

"No house anywhere round. Must be the barn is here to store the hay," said Uncle Weary. "Eddie, you run round to the back and see if there's any sort of shed for the horse."

Eddie did as he was told, and came back in a moment with the report that there was a "lean-to" against the barn where there was a manger, and he was sure horses had been kept there. They found the place quite big enough for their small wagon and for Staggers. It had evidently been built as a temporary stable during haying-time, and would probably remain empty until another season.

"Just the thing for us. Couldn't be better," said the young man, in a tone of satisfaction, while the boys jumped to the ground.



## THE HAY-BARN

"Uncle Weary, won't you stay in the wagon and let us take care of the horse? It's awful cold and wet out here, and I'm afraid it'll make you worse," said Archie; and Eddie joined in: "Yes, please do. We can get dinner and everything."

"Well, I declare!" cried Uncle Weary, laughing. "You propose to take me in hand, do you? Well, I guess you could do it. But I'd better look around a little and see how things are."

He started to get out, but, seeing the pools of water lying about on the earth floor of the shed and beginning to cough at the same time, he climbed back, and when he could speak he said, with great difficulty: "Well, I might as well let you see what you can do."

The boys were delighted, and felt very important as they took Staggers from the shafts, rubbed him down, tied him to the manger, and fed and watered him. There was feed in a bag in the wagon, and Eddie brought water in a pail from a brook in the meadow. The rain was falling steadily now, but the boys kept dry, as Uncle Weary made them wear little rubber capes whenever they had to go out in the rain.

It was almost eight o'clock by the time Staggers was made comfortable, and the boys were



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very hungry. "Where shall we build the fire?" asked Eddie, coming to the wagon.

"You'll see," said Uncle Weary, and, opening a box, he brought out a little oil-stove, which he filled with kerosene from a tin can. He placed it on the box, lighted it, and put on it some bacon in a little frying-pan.

"Does pretty well for a rainy day, doesn't it?" he remarked.

"Oh, this is nice!" said Eddie, admiringly. "How did you happen to think of it?"

"Don't I think of everything?" said the young man, cutting some thick slices from a loaf of bread.

"Yes, and you can do everything," said Eddie, heartily, really believing Uncle Weary able to meet any emergency.

Some harvest-apples which they had brought with them, together with plenty of good bread and butter and the hot bacon, made an excellent breakfast for hungry boys. After the meal, at Uncle Weary's suggestion, they sat on Staggers' back and played checkers, while the young man laid down in the wagon to sleep.

This was great fun at first, but they were such active little fellows that the cramped position became tiring after a short time, and the novelty of playing checkers on horseback wore off. They could not carry on any sort of play in the little



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shed without disturbing Uncle Weary, and it seemed probable that the time would hang rather heavily on their hands.

"I wish it would stop raining, so we could go out and have some fun," whispered Archie.

The young man overheard the remark, and said: "You boys aren't very smart. Why don't you play on the hay in the barn?"

"Oh, can we do that?" said Eddie, joyfully. "I didn't s'pose you'd let us. My uncle says it spoils hay to jump on it."

"Children of your size can't hurt it."

This was permission enough, and Eddie slipped down from the horse's back, calling, gleefully: "Come on, Archie! That's the most fun of anything."

They wanted Jip to play with them, but Uncle Weary said he would make too much noise, so the little dog had to stay quietly in the wagon with the kitten.

The boys succeeded, by their united strength, in opening the big door, and, peering through the dim light, they saw heaps of fresh, sweet-smelling hay piled high on each side, leaving a broad passage through the centre.

Archie had never had the fun of playing in a barn, and looked at the steep walls on either side rather doubtfully. But Eddie knew just what to do, and immediately scrambled up a tall lad-



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der which rested against the hay, climbed from that to a broad beam near the ceiling, and began jumping on the soft bed beneath with squeals of delight.

Archie followed immediately, and then began a series of somersaults and tumblings, of sliding to the floor down a steep incline, and, when they were tired of that, hiding in holes and playing "bear."

"Ain't this fun?" said Eddie, when they stopped a moment to rest, his little, tanned face covered with perspiration.

"I should say so," said Archie, heartily. "It's most as good as swimming or fishing."

They played again until they were hungry, and then went back to the wagon, where they found that Uncle Weary had prepared a nice stew on the little stove. They played again in the barn in the afternoon, and this time Jip was allowed to go with them. But every time he barked he was punished, so that he soon learned to keep still.

After supper they were tired and sleepy, and ready for bed before dark. "I guess we'll stay here and sleep on the hay," said Uncle Weary, when they turned to him for orders.

This was exactly what the boys wanted, and, after seeing their guardian stretched on a soft pile near the open door, they cuddled down in



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warm nests they had made and were asleep immediately.

In the morning the air was quite cold and still damp. The rain had stopped falling, but there was promise of more, for the sky was gray and lowering. "Beats all," said Uncle Weary. "I'd say this was the equinoctial if it was a little later."

He had coughed all night, and looked pale and weak, with a red spot on either cheek. The boys noticed his unusual quietness as he lay in the hay long after sunrise, and, though he did not complain, they felt sure he was ill. They begged him again to let them get breakfast and do all the work, and this time he assented without comment.

"We'll start right after breakfast," he said. "I've been thinking I'd better turn back and get you fellows to the railroad and send you home. I'm afraid I'm in for a spell of sickness and can't take care of you."

"What 'll *you* do?" asked Archie.

"I don't know. I'll get along some way. I always do."

"But I don't want to go home and leave you while you're sick," said Archie, earnestly. "You need Eddie and me to take care of you."

"Why can't we go back to the Den and stay till you're better?" asked Eddie.



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"I'm afraid if we do that the sheriff will be bothering us about the counterfeiters' cave. Wag can tell him about it if we're not there; I've arranged to have him get the reward for finding it. You want him to have it, don't you?"

The boys agreed that this would suit them best, and Eddie said: "Oh, do let us go on, then. I never want to leave you."

Uncle Weary coughed, and then whispered, hoarsely: "Well, you run along now and get breakfast while I think it over."

The little shed was cold and damp and uncomfortable, but the boys were tough and did not mind, and rushed about in their bare feet through the mud to water and feed Staggers and prepare the breakfast.

Then they found, to their consternation, that rats had been in the wagon during the night and had done a deal of mischief. They had taken about half the cheese, kept in a pasteboard box, and had eaten holes in the bag of grain, which was scattered in heaps on the floor. "Oh, what 'll we do!" said Eddie, in dismay. "We must go and tell Uncle Weary right off."

"No, don't bother him," said Archie. "He's too sick. He couldn't help it now, and we can clean up as well as he can."

"But what 'll we do with the feed?" asked Eddie, helplessly.



## THE HAY-BARN

"Sew up the holes, of course," said Archie, in a very good imitation of Uncle Weary's tones.

Eddie fell in with the suggestion at once, and together they lifted the heavy bag to the ground and placed it on a dry board. They fed and watered the horse and made the coffee, and then Archie looked for the needles and thread, while Eddie began to clean the floor of the wagon. Just then they heard voices, and, looking out, saw two farmer boys, a little older and larger than themselves, looking quite as astonished as they were. All four stared in silence for an instant, and then the older farmer boy said, gruffly: "What you doin' here?"

Before the children could answer, the barn-door opened and Uncle Weary stepped out. "Here's fifty cents, boys, for the use of your barn and the hay our horse has eaten. We've been caught in the rain and stayed here overnight," he said, handing the money to the older boy.

"That's all right, so long as you didn't set the barn afire," said the boy, as he walked away with his brother.

"Now we must hurry off before they get home, or we'll be arrested for vagrants," said Uncle Weary.

The little boys lifted the bag of feed in great haste into the wagon, the grain dribbling out of



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a big hole near the bottom, while the young man buckled the harness on the old horse and fastened him in the shafts, with the help of the children.

"He'll have to finish his breakfast and we'll eat ours in a safer place than this," said Uncle Weary, as they clambered into the wagon and drove hurriedly round the barn to the lane. They did not retrace their steps, and Archie ventured to say: "We're not going back, are we?"

"I guess we'll try to make Jericho. We can manage it in a couple of days if we have good luck," said their guardian, much to the boys' delight. They said nothing, however, as they thought this would best please Uncle Weary, and in silence the old horse plodded down the muddy lane and turned into the highway, which was on the opposite side of the valley from the one they had first travelled, but went in the same direction.

"All roads lead to Jericho," said Uncle Weary. "All we have to do is to face south and keep going."

The rain slackened a little now, and they all breakfasted by the roadside. The young man drank a great deal of water from the running brook where they stopped, but ate very little, and when they were ready to start again seemed willing to take Archie's suggestion to lie down and let him drive.

"All right—you're the doctor," he said, whim-



## THE HAY-BARN

sically, as he crawled into the wagon and allowed Eddie to cover him and arrange his pillow.

He seemed to sleep for perhaps an hour, coughing painfully at intervals, and the boys spoke in whispers so as not to disturb him. Then he told them to stop at the first store they came to and buy some crackers. "They have groceries, usually, at the post-offices along these country roads. You'll find some money in a leather wallet in the bottom of the feed-bag. I thought it would be as safe there as anywhere. Did you see it when you fed the horse?"

"No, we didn't look," said Archie.

"Well, it's there, and you must take good care of it. It's all we have, and it wouldn't do to lose it."

"Must Eddie do all the talking at the store?" asked Archie.

Uncle Weary thought for a moment, and then said: "I guess that's not necessary any more. I don't care which does the talking, only don't answer questions, and don't tell folks any more than you have to, about our affairs."

Then, giving his watch and compass to Archie, he told the boys to stop about noon, if they came to good water, to feed and rest the horse and to eat their own luncheon.

"Shall we keep right on this road?" asked Archie.



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"Follow your compass and go south. That's all you need to know. I didn't sleep last night, so don't wake me unless you have to."

He finished feebly and closed his eyes. The boys felt very sober and anxious, but dared not talk. They both had fears that the wallet had fallen from the hole in the feed-bag when they put it in the wagon in such haste, but there was no way of knowing until they stopped. Fortunately, not long after this the watch told them it was almost noon, and, coming about that time to a watering-trough, they hastened to take the bag out and carry it some distance from the wagon. Then they made a thorough search, and found that the money was gone.

"We'll have to tell him, won't we?" whispered Eddie.

"Not till he wakes up," said Archie, also whispering.

But the young man did not waken during the long hours of the afternoon. The children ate when they were hungry, watered and fed the horse, and allowed him to rest often. About six o'clock it began to rain. As they did not know what else to do, they kept on, thinking it better for the horse to walk than to stand in the wet, and not daring to stop at the farm-houses they were passing.

Uncle Weary did not cough now, and the chil-



## THE HAY-BARN

dren were much comforted by the thought that he was better. It never occurred to them to disturb him, and, believing that he would soon waken and tell them what to do for the night, they jogged along in the cold, drizzling rain until they both fell asleep.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE HAVEN

STAGGERS seemed to realize that something unusual had happened, and that he ought to put them all in a safe place and wait for further orders; for, when the reins dropped from the hands of the sleepy little boy, the faithful old horse walked quietly to one side of the road and stood on a grassy spot, with his head bowed patiently, while the rain dripped from his bony sides. The boys slept on, hour after hour, as only tired and healthy children can. They were protected from the wet by the cover of the wagon, but the air was damp and chilly, and toward morning Eddie was awakened by Jip, who crawled into his arms, cold and shivering. The child had no idea where he was, but, reaching out in the darkness, he touched a cold, clammy hand.

His screams wakened Archie, who called out: "What is it? Where are we? What's the matter?"



## THE HAVEN

"Oh, Uncle Weary's dead! I know he is!" said Eddie, wildly.

"You just dreamed it, I guess. Don't make such a noise or you'll wake him."

Eddie stopped crying, and then they thought they heard a faint moan.

They called his name several times, and when he did not answer, Archie said: "I believe he's very sick. We must have a light."

They searched in the darkness and found some matches. The lantern, which was within easy reach, was lighted, and then Eddie screamed again with terror.

Uncle Weary was lying with his eyes closed and a crimson stain on his chin.

"Oh, some one has tried to kill him while we were asleep!" shrieked Eddie.

"Stop your crying!" ordered Archie, in the same tone he had heard their guardian use. "Don't you know you'll make him worse? I know what's the matter. He's got the hemridge. My uncle George had that in the Adirondacks when he was out camping."

Eddie became quiet at once, but was too frightened to speak, and stood staring with open mouth at the sick man.

"We must give him some salt," said Archie. "That's what the guide did for Uncle George, and it saved his life."



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The thought that there was something he could do to help, brought Eddie to his senses, and he immediately scrambled to the back of the wagon, where the salt was kept, and brought back a bagful of it.

"Hold up his head a little, so I can put some in his mouth," said Archie, who, as a matter of course, assumed command. The young man was conscious and aware of what was being done for him, and, although very weak from loss of blood, had strength enough to swallow the salt. The remedy was quickly effective, and the flow of blood soon stopped. Uncle Weary opened his eyes and smiled faintly, but he was too weak to speak or move.

"What shall we do now?" asked Eddie, in a whisper.

"We must take him into the nearest house and have a doctor," said Archie, promptly.

It was several minutes before the little fellows could get the old horse back into the road, as the lines had fallen under his heels, and in the rain and darkness it was difficult to find and straighten them. But they were all right when this was done, as Stagers had stood almost motionless, and they started at a very slow walk, for the horse was stiff and lame from exposure and cold.

Archie put the little rubber cape over his shoulders and walked ahead with the lantern to



## THE HAVEN

show the way, and Eddie sat on the seat to drive. They went on in this way for perhaps a quarter of a mile, when they saw a light by the side of the road. "That must be a house," said Archie. "I'll go and see. You stay where you are till I come back."

The light shone faintly from the window of a small dwelling, as the child had surmised. He walked up the gravelled path, with hollyhocks and rose-bushes on either side of him, and stood on a broad stone step while he rapped on the front door. The only answer was a dog's hoarse bark. Eddie heard it as he sat in the wagon in front of the gate, and trembled so that he could hardly hold the lines. Archie was very much frightened, too, but he stood his ground and rapped again. The dog barked more angrily than before. The boy repeated his knocking many times, and at last he heard the creaking of a window-shutter near him, and a woman's voice said: "Who is it? What do you want?"

"My uncle's very sick out here in our wagon. Won't you let us come into your house?" said Archie.

This time the shutter flew open, and the woman exclaimed: "For the land's sake! Why, you poor baby! You wait there and I'll be right out."

When she came to the door a moment later her hand was on the collar of a big dog, which



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she was scolding. "He won't bite you, dear," she said, reassuringly. "Don't you be afraid of Tige. Come right in out of the rain."

"Can't somebody bring Uncle Weary in? He's very sick, and he can't walk."

"What's the matter of him?"

"He's got the hemridge, I guess."

"The hemridge! What is the child talkin' about?"

"Why, the blood was coming out of his mouth, and we stopped it with salt."

"Oh, I know what you mean," said the woman. "A hemorrhage. Massy sakes! But that's awful! I'll get the hired man up and come right out there. Father!" she called, "you make Tige go into the sittin'-room and stay there!"

"Come here, Tige!" said a commanding voice, which the dog obeyed at once.

The woman then ran up a small stairway and rapped vigorously on a door, saying: "Get up, quick, Ivan! I want you."

As soon as she knew he was awake she threw over her loose wrapper a man's overcoat, thrust her stockinged feet into a pair of overshoes, and, tying a small shawl over her head, joined Archie, who was now standing with his lantern in the little hall.

The big Finn had hurried into his clothes and was with them by this time. He was much



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startled by being called in this abrupt way, and had no idea what was wanted, but he followed his mistress and Archie to the wagon and waited without a word for further orders.

“If there isn’t another baby!” said the woman, in astonishment, as the light of the lantern fell on Eddie’s frightened face, now covered with tears. “This beats all I ever heard of! But where’s the sick man?”

They lifted the curtain at the back and held the lantern so that she could see. One glance showed his condition and the need of immediate action. “Here, Ivan, take him in your arms and put him in my bed,” she commanded.

The Finn could speak very little English, but he understood enough to obey this order. He was very strong and very dexterous, and knew how to manage the difficult task of getting Uncle Weary out of the wagon. He did this with the help of all of them, and carried his burden into the house as easily as though it had been a baby.

The woman led the way through a living-room lighted by the lamp which had guided the boys’ steps. By an open fire sat a stout, middle-aged man, who was evidently a cripple, for two heavy crutches stood by his arm-chair, and one foot, wrapped in cloths, rested on a substantial stool.

“What on earth are ye bringing in here, Maria?” he exclaimed in amazement, as he



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caught a glimpse of Uncle Weary's haggard face and thin, dangling legs.

"He's an awful sick man, father," said his wife. "I'll tell ye about it in a minute. I want to get him on the bed first."

The young man was laid gently down in the small adjoining room, and the Finn went back to take care of the horse, while the woman told her husband in a few words what had happened, and brought the wet, shivering children to the fire.

"I couldn't do anything but take 'em in, father, could I?" she said, while helping Archie to unbutton his jacket.

"I wouldn't think much on ye if ye hadn't," said the old fellow. "But you better look after your sick man, and I'll see that these little rats are warmed and dried."

She hurried back to the invalid, and the cripple said, cheerfully: "Well, well! This is pretty tough luck, ain't it?"

The boys said nothing, and their host went on, "Put some more wood on, bub, and let's have a fire."

Eddie threw some dry kindling on the coals, and a bright blaze sparkled in the old fireplace.

"That's more like it," said their host. "Now peel off them wet duds and hang 'em on the chairs



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to dry. Mother 'll be here in a minute to fix ye up with some dry ones."

He made them stand by his chair while he helped them take off their sticky garments and wrapped them in old shawls. "There," he said, kindly, "I guess that 'll do till she comes."

They held their cold, red hands and feet toward the comforting warmth, and their host went on: "You're pretty little shavers to be out on the road at this time o' night. Where'd you come from, and where're ye goin'?"

Archie longed to answer these questions and talk freely with this kind, friendly man, and tell him all about their strange experiences. But he felt sure that Uncle Weary would not like to have him do that. His last words had been a caution not to talk any more than was necessary. Besides, he was used now to having Eddie speak for them both, so he said nothing, and Eddie answered, in his sweet voice: "We came from Melton, and we're going to Jericho."

"Melton! Lemme see. Oh yes, I know. That's up in Dodge County. You live in Jericho?"

"Uncle Weary has friends there."

"You're goin' visitin'?"

"We're just goin' there to pick blackberries for the hotel."

"Oh yes, I see," said the old farmer. "That's



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how you happen to be travellin' about barefoot. Lots of folks go round the country in the summer and make quite a little pile of money in the busy season. You did pretty well, I expect. Got quite rich, didn't ye?"

"I don't know," said Eddie, faintly.

Archie's eyes were fixed on the old farmer's face with such a bright and intelligent expression that the latter turned to him now and said: "Why don't you have something to say, little feller. You look smart enough to talk like a house afire."

The child looked away at this, biting his lip, and the old man said, gently: "There, it's all right. You're bashful, I expect. I was that way myself when I was your age, and I know all about it, but you needn't be afraid of me. Why, I think all the world of little boys."

His wife and the hired man had been very busy during this time in caring for the sick man. She now came back to the group by the fire, looking so sober that her husband said: "He's pretty bad, ain't he, mother?"

"Well, I should say. He lies there like a log, though I don't think he's unconscious. He's just weak. But I've done everything I can for him. Ivan got him into bed, and I washed him up a little and made him swallow a spoonful of warm milk with a drop of whiskey in it. It's lucky



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the doctor is comin' to see you this mornin'. I've sent Ivan over to tell him to come right away. He can have his breakfast here."

Eddie burst out sobbing at this. "Oh, will Uncle Weary die?" he cried.

"Hush! He'll hear you," said Archie.

"Poor little man!" said the good woman, gathering the weeping child in her arms and sitting down with him on her lap before the fire. "Your uncle ain't a-goin' to die, dearie. We won't let him. Our good doctor 'll be here now pretty soon, and he'll tell us what to do, and I'm sure he'll be well again right off."

Eddie put his arms around her neck and cried without any noise on her shoulder, while she smoothed his yellow curls with her hand.

"You'd better put those kids to bed, Maria. They're all tuckered out," said the farmer.

"Yes, that's so," said his wife. "Now, I'm goin' to get you some bread and milk, and then you must both have a nap. That's the best thing you can do for your uncle."

"Can't we wait till the doctor comes, Mrs.—I don't know your name," said Archie.

"Why, of course. We haven't been introduced, have we? I thought everybody knew the Carns. We've lived here so long. But you're strangers, ain't you?"

"And what's your names?" asked the farmer.



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"Archie and Eddie, and we'd like to know what the doctor thinks about Uncle Weary."

"He won't get here for a couple of hours. When he does come, I'll let you know," said Mrs. Carn. She kissed them both, and the farmer shook hands heartily, saying to Eddie, as he patted his head: "Don't be so down in the mouth, bub. Your uncle's all right now he's got into mother's hands, and don't you forget it."

They were put into one bed in a small room under the eaves, where Eddie fell asleep at once, but Archie lay awake listening for sounds that would tell him the doctor had come.

At five o'clock he heard wheels at the door, and ran down to the living-room in a big night-gown which Mrs. Carn had put on him. Mr. Carn was sleeping in his chair, and the child could hear a low murmur of voices through the closed bedroom door. He dressed in his dried garments, omitting his jacket, for the weather was now warm, and sat down in the shadow of the big arm-chair and waited.

In a few minutes the door of the bedroom opened, and the doctor came out with Mrs. Carn. Their footsteps wakened the sleeper, who sat up and rubbed his eyes, saying: "Well! I must 'a' been takin' a little cat-nap. How's the sick man, doc? Pretty bad off, ain't he?"



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"While there's life there's hope," said the mild-faced old man.

"Dear! dear! So bad as that? I s'pose you'll get him in the hospital soon's you can?"

The doctor shook his head. "I'm afraid he can't be stirred for a day or two without great danger, and after that time there may be no need of it."

"I declare, doc, I don't see how we'll get through," said the farmer, in an anxious voice. "It wouldn't make so much difference if I was well, but here I be laid up with this blamed foot, with my wife havin' to wait on me. We can't get help for love or money to run the milk wagon. She's had to do that with all the rest, and she's plum worked to death."

"It never rains but it pours," said Mrs. Carn. "Ivan has just told me that Jerry is lame this morning, and he's the only horse we can spare just now from the hayin'."

"I think I know of a woman who would come and help you out," said the doctor. "This man's life depends, just now, on good nursing. I wish you could do it, Mrs. Carn. You'd pull him through if anybody can."

"Doctor, we're awful hard up just now. We really couldn't afford to pay out money for a nurse, and, from the looks of these people, I don't believe they have any. We must just



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make the best of it. It won't hurt the hay to let it go for a day or two. Ivan can take one of the work-horses and deliver the milk to-day, and perhaps something will turn up to help us out."

"We had some money, and we lost it out of a hole in the bag; but Eddie and I can earn some more," said Archie, rising from his stool and speaking, excitedly.

None of them knew he was in the room, and, when his little, bright head and shining face appeared so suddenly, they all exclaimed.

"What the dickens!" began the farmer.

"Land o' love!" said his wife, sitting down quickly, with her hand over her heart. "How that child scared me! You shouldn't listen to what older folks are talkin' about," she said, reprovingly.

"I couldn't help it!" exclaimed Archie.

"But you could let us know you were here."

"Why, I thought you did know," said Archie, very much surprised. "I was just sitting by Mr. Carn, where I sat last night."

"Don't that beat all!" exclaimed the farmer. "I was asleep when he came in, and I never thought o' lookin' on that side o' me, and my big chair hid him from you."

The doctor had heard the story of their arrival the night before, and now broke in: "It's



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all right for that boy to take part in this council. He has an old head on him. If he had the presence of mind to do what he did last night—Why, there isn't a grown person in a thousand would have done better! He's—well, I guess you can trust him."

"That's so," said the farmer, heartily. "He's a regular little man, and a whole lot more level-headed than most men grown."

Mrs. Carn put her arms around the child and kissed him. "What do you think you and Eddie can do to earn money, dear?" she asked.

"You said your horse is lame. We can drive ours to take 'round the milk, and then we can pick berries to sell."

"What did I tell you?" said the doctor. "Now that's a good plan fixed up right out o' hand."

"I dunno but what the little monkey can do it," laughed the old farmer.

"You're a good boy," said Mrs. Carn, "and if you and Eddie can carry the milk around to-day I'll take the best kind o' care of your poor uncle."

"You couldn't do better, Mrs. Carn," said the doctor, looking about the disorderly room for his hat.

"I think so, too. It's a regular godsend to have the horse and all just now. Ivan will start



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'em soon's he's through milkin', and they can go by the names of the streets on the lamp-posts and by the numbers of the houses. I'm not afraid but what so smart a child as he is can manage the business all right." Then, turning to Archie, she said: "Now you go and wake Eddie, and I'll get your breakfast."

After the boy had gone the doctor said, as he was about to leave: "You'll have to watch your sick man pretty sharp. It's nip and tuck if he gets well. There'd be some chance for him if he could sleep. But he seems keyed way up. Shouldn't wonder if he had something on his mind."

"Do you think we'd better send for his folks, doctor? I s'pose they'd be so poor they couldn't get here if we did, but perhaps we ought to let 'em know how sick he is, anyway."

"I'll call this afternoon, and we can see then."

The doctor was in his buckboard and ready to drive down the gravelled road. Archie ran up the steep stairway to the bedside of his sleeping comrade, and shook his shoulder vigorously, shouting: "Get up, quick, Eddie! We're going to sell milk to make money for Uncle Weary!"



## CHAPTER XXV

### EM TO THE RESCUE

IT was about six o'clock when Ivan and the boys started with the morning's supply of milk for the customers in the town about a mile away. The old horse was pretty lame and stiff after his hard night's experience, but he came from tough stock and could stand a good deal. Besides, he had been well fed and rubbed, and seemed able to draw the light milk wagon without difficulty.

The boys had a list of customers, and, as the town was laid out in squares, with the names of streets on lamp-posts at the corners, they had no trouble in finding the right houses by means of the numbers.

Ivan left them, as soon as he was sure they understood what to do, and hurried back to his haying. The boys scurried around to the back doors, pouring their pints and quarts of milk into various pans and bowls, and answering questions put by all sorts of dressed and half-dressed women and children.



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It was characteristic of Eddie that he had asked no questions or required any explanations when he was wakened that morning and told of the new plans. He accepted Archie's leadership, as he had that of Uncle Weary, trustingly and confidingly, feeling sure that everything was being done for the best. Besides, during the hurry of starting, and afterward when delivering the milk, there had been no time to talk things over. But now, as they jogged homeward through the August heat in their thin little shirts and blue overalls, Archie told his companion of the conversation he had overheard that morning, and the need of making good the lost wallet.

"But you said your father was rich. Why don't you write to him for the money?" asked Eddie.

"Because I'm sure he'd take me right away if I did, and Uncle Weary said he wanted to go home with me himself. The thing for us to do is to help Mrs. Carn all we can, so she will take care of Uncle Weary."

Archie was acting from mixed motives, as most people do. He really was devoted to Uncle Weary, and believed that he was doing just what the young man would wish to have done. At the same time he enjoyed the feeling of importance that had come since he had undertaken



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to direct affairs. All the praise he had received that morning was delightful to him. He would like to stay where he could hear more of it.

Mrs. Carn was in the kitchen when they drove up to the house. She came to the door, putting her finger to her lips. "The doctor wants us to be very quiet," she whispered. "Your uncle ain't any worse," she added, as she noticed Eddie's alarmed face, "but we're trying to make him sleep. He needs that more than anything. I'd be awful glad to have you help about the house-work if you'd just as lieves. Everything's dreadfully behind. Such smart boys as you be can make fires and wash dishes, I expect?"

"Oh, yes indeed," said Eddie, jumping from the wagon and running to the stove.

Archie put Staggers in the barn, and when he came back to the kitchen a kettle of water was getting hot over a brisk fire, and Eddie was putting together the soiled dishes and milk-pans which covered the tables, the sink, and even stood in heaps on the floor.

Mrs. Carn had gone from the kitchen after hearing briefly Eddie's account of the morning's experience, and the boys were left to bring order out of confusion in their own way. When she came back an hour later she found the dishes all clean and put away on the shelves, the kitchen floor swept, and a panful of potatoes, which Ed-



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die had found under the sink, peeled and lying in water ready to boil.

"Well, if you ain't the nicest boys!" she exclaimed. "I'll tell father, and he'll be so *pleased!*"

"What can we do next?" asked Archie.

"Well, I'm goin' to get dinner now. You may set the table if you want to."

"Let us get dinner all by ourselves," said the boy, eagerly.

"Why, such little fellows as you can't cook," said Mrs. Carn, laughing.

"Oh, yes we can," said Eddie. "Uncle Weary lets us get dinner lots of times. You just try us!"

"I've half a notion to. I've been so extra busy this mornin', doin' chores and churnin', with all the rest, I haven't had a minute's time to dress father's foot, and I'd like to do that before dinner."

She told them where to find the pork-barrel, the coffee-pot, and frying-pan, and, after giving directions to set the table in the kitchen and call her when the meal was ready, she hurried away. The boys were so experienced that it was an easy matter to prepare the simple food. Dinner was all ready to serve hot when Ivan came in at noon from the hay-field and wheeled Mr. Carn in his arm-chair to the table.



## EM TO THE RESCUE

"Ain't they the smartest boys ye ever see in yer life, Maria!" said the farmer, in a hoarse whisper.

"I don't see how I could 'a' done without 'em!" said his wife, smiling.

The men and boys ate in their shirt-sleeves, all of them so hearty and hungry that they did not mind the heat of the cook-stove, or the swarms of flies which had to be brushed away continually. Mrs. Carn ate hurriedly, warmed some milk for the invalid, and carried it to him. Mr. Carn was moved back as quietly as possible to his place in the living-room, and the boys were left to wash the dishes. When this task was finished, Mrs. Carn made them go to the barn and take a nap on the hay. They were so tired by this time, from their exciting experiences, that they slept until supper-time, when she showed them where they could bathe in a stream near the house.

When they came back they found the doctor had been there and had gone away.

"How is Uncle Weary?" asked the boys together.

"Eat your suppers and go to bed, and I'll come up and tell you about him pretty soon," said Mrs. Carn.

She went to them before they were asleep, and sat on the edge of their bed. "The doctor thinks



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your uncle ain't any worse," she began, reassuringly, "but we're a little worried because he don't sleep. He hasn't closed his eyes since he came here. So we all think it best to send for his folks. If his ma was here, perhaps he'd feel better."

"His ma is dead," said Eddie.

"Well, how about his pa?"

"Uncle Weary says he can't walk because he's got the rheumatism."

"Dear, dear! What a pity! But hasn't he any brother or sister that we could send for?"

"I don't know."

"Why, you're his nephews, ain't you? Couldn't your folks come?"

"My pa and ma are dead," said the child, simply.

"Poor little orphans," said the woman, tenderly, not noticing that Archie had not spoken, and supposing them to be brothers.

"We'd better send for Em," said Archie, his big eyes fixed intently on Mrs. Carn's face.

"Who is she?" asked the woman, quickly.

"She's the niece of the hotel-keeper at Melton," said Eddie. "She teaches school sometimes, but this summer she waits on the table because they can't get anybody else."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Carn. "The farmers' girls round here do that to help out at



## EM TO THE RESCUE

the summer hotels. I don't know what they'd do without 'em. I see how it is. Your uncle's thinkin' of her all the time, and that's why he can't sleep."

The children told her Em's full name and address, and Mrs. Carn wrote it down hurriedly on a scrap of paper with a pencil she took from her pocket. "Now you must be good little boys and go to sleep," she said, kissing them both. "Your uncle is going to get well right off, now."

"Yes, I'm so glad Em's coming. She'll cure him, I know," said Eddie, fervently.

Mrs. Carn hastened down the stairs and wrote a telegram on the kitchen table, crossing out various words until she had only ten left. As corrected, it read:

MISS EMMA MOORE,—Your friend very sick. Come at once to my house.  
J. A. CARN.

The doctor was waiting for the message, which he was to send from the village. When he was told of Em's probable relation to the sick man, he said: "I hope she's a sensible girl. If she isn't, there's very little hope for the poor fellow. It's a kill-or-cure remedy to get her here. However, he won't live long as he is now, and there doesn't seem to be anything else to do."

Mrs. Carn prepared for a long night of watching by the bedside of the wanderer. She made



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

her husband comfortable for the rest he was only able to take in his chair, she closed the windows and doors, for the air had grown chilly with the setting of the sun, she brought out her church paper to read when she should have leisure for it, and then sat down by the lamp in the kitchen to wait.

Her patient lay motionless, breathing faintly and staring at the ceiling as the hours went by. His nurse gave him milk and stimulants at intervals, which he swallowed docilely, but there was no sign of the sleep which, in his weakened state, was all that would save him.

At eleven o'clock Mrs. Carn heard a faint sound of rolling wheels, and soon after a light tap on the kitchen door. She opened it a small crack and, peeping out, saw a young woman, who asked in a whisper if she were Mrs. Carn.

"Yes, and you're Miss Emma Moore, I guess. Come right in. I'm awful glad you're here," was the cordial answer.

Em entered with a quick, light step. She took off her hat and laid it on the table, saying: "The doctor brought me out. He met me at the train. He's told me all about it. Is there any change?"

"Not yet," said Mrs. Carn, shaking her head.

"Take me to him," said Em, going toward the door. When she bent over the young man his eyes left the ceiling and rested on her face.



## EM TO THE RESCUE

"Do you know me, Will?" she asked.

A very faint smile came to his face, and he whispered, so low that she put her ear close to his lips to hear: "I thought you would come."

The color rushed into her pale cheeks, and she said, firmly and cheerfully: "Yes, I'm here to stay and take care of you. I'm going into the kitchen a moment, but I'll be right back."

"Does your minister live near here?" she asked, going directly to Mrs. Carn.

"Why? What do you ask me that for?" gasped the frightened woman. "You don't mean he's dyin', do you?"

"I want the minister to come and marry us as soon as he can get here."

"Goodness sakes alive!" said Mrs. Carn, putting her hand to her heart. "You take my breath away!"

"We expected to be married in the spring," went on Em, in an urgent whisper, "if he was well enough then, but I think it's best not to wait a minute longer than we can help now. Will you ask the doctor when he comes in, to go for the minister?"

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Carn, rising. "That's just the thing to do. My! but you're a brave, good girl! Father 'll be so tickled!"

The minister was there within an hour, and stood with the doctor by Uncle Weary's bed-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

side. "Will, shall we be married now?" asked Em. She listened closely to catch his faint reply. "I can't help myself, can I?"

She laughed a little, and then stood by him with a sober face while the few solemn words were spoken which made them man and wife. They were left alone then, and the bride said: "Will, the doctor believes you won't get well unless you go to sleep. You don't want to die and leave me, do you?"

The young man looked at her and said nothing, but the tense expression seemed to be leaving his face, and in a few moments he closed his eyes.

It was perhaps half an hour later that Em left the room, shutting the door very softly, and walked to where Mrs. Carn was crying by her husband's arm-chair. He reached out his hand to clasp that of the new-comer, and said, apologetically: "She just can't help cryin' at weddin's."

"Please don't cry any more," whispered Em. "I'm afraid you'll disturb Mr. Williams. He's asleep."



## CHAPTER XXVI

### EXPLANATIONS

WHEN the boys slipped quietly down-stairs the next morning, with the intention of preparing breakfast, they found Em standing by the sink. This was not surprising. Her being there was in keeping with everything else that happened. Eddie bounded toward her with a cry of joy and put his arms round her waist, saying: "Oh, I'm so glad you've come! Now Uncle Weary 'll get well."

"Hush!" said Em. "You must be very quiet. He's asleep now, and the doctor says it's his only chance."

She asked no questions, and hardly seemed to see them as she served breakfast from a neatly spread table. As soon as they had finished, she cautioned them to tread lightly, and sent them off. As they were about to drive away in the milk wagon, she said: "When you get back you may hunt or fish or do anything you please."



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Why, we're going to help about the work, aren't we?" said Eddie.

"There's no need of that in the house, now that I'm here, and the doctor is going to send a man from the village at noon to help Ivan. Mr. Carn is fretting because he's afraid you'll work too hard. He doesn't want you to do anything but deliver milk. He thinks that's almost too much. He'd feel better if he knew you were playing and having a good time."

"Would Uncle Weary like that?" asked Archie.

"I'm sure he would. You know he wants you to work some and play a great deal."

"I think it's play to go 'round with the milk," said the boy.

"Can't we shoot a squirrel to cook for him?" asked Eddie.

"That's a good idea," said Em, starting to go in. But she turned back to say: "You may call me Aunt Em now, if you want to. Your uncle and I were married last night."

She blushed as she spoke, which made her seem, for the first time, like Em, and disappeared.

During the next three days Uncle Weary slept much of the time. When he was awake, he lay quietly, with a contented expression, watching his wife as she made the room neat or occupied



## EXPLANATIONS

herself in other ways for his comfort. He was not allowed to speak yet, except to whisper briefly, and he was too weak to move at all. Yet the doctor was much pleased with his progress. "He'll pull through now all right," he said to Em at the end of the third day, "and he may thank you for his life. If you hadn't come when you did, and been such a good nurse, he'd 'a' been a goner, and no mistake."

She ignored the compliment, and said: "Doctor, when can he be moved out-of-doors. He teases for that all the time; says he can't breathe the air of a house."

"Well, in about a week, perhaps. But you tell him his head's level. The only show for him is an out-door life in the right kind of climate, and he may rough it again as soon as he gets a little more strength."

There was no more anxiety after that, and the little household became a very peaceful one. The boys were allowed to come into the sick man's room for a few minutes every day, and, though he could not say more than a few words, he enjoyed hearing them talk of their experiences as milk-sellers, and seemed very much pleased when he learned they were having a good deal of fun about the farm. At the end of a week he could listen to Mr. Carn reading the paper, and very soon the two invalids spent the days



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

together, much to the satisfaction of both of them.

The active farmer had been laid up a month or more with a severe injury to his foot. It was getting well now, but he was still confined to the house, and, before his visitors came, he was finding his days of convalescence very dull. It seemed too good to be true, therefore, that he should have within reach, so unexpectedly in these busy days, another man to talk to—for at last Uncle Weary could be propped up by pillows in bed and was allowed to carry on a limited conversation. When to this privilege was added that of playing checkers, the hours passed swiftly. This arrangement gave Em much time to help Mrs. Carn about the house-work, and the two women were busy together from morning till night. "I declare, it seems like livin' again to have the windows washed and the floors cleaned," said the farmer's wife. "Since father got hurt things have got dreadfully behind. With all the milk to see to, and tendin' to him, it was as much as ever that I got enough for us all to eat. I don't know what we'd 'a' done without you and these dear little fellows."

"If we worked our fingers to the bone we couldn't begin to make up to you for all you've done for us," said the New England girl, with much more feeling than she usually showed.



## EXPLANATIONS

"Laws a massy! what 're you talkin' about? We didn't do more'n we ought to, and right from the start these boys have more than paid the way of all of you; and, now that Mr. Williams is such good company for father, and you do the washin' and ironin' and the heft of the house-work, why, we're in debt to you, and I don't know how we're ever goin' to pay you."

"The doctor thinks Mr. Williams can start now in a few days," said Em. "He longs to sleep out-doors again. He hasn't lived in a house for several years."

"You don't mean it! Why, he don't look like — well, that kind of a person. You'd think he was just anybody, like all the rest of us."

"He's not a tramp," said Em, quickly, and a little offended. "He earns his living by doctoring horses and cattle."

"I didn't mean that, of course," said Mrs. Carn, hastily. "I thought he looked smart enough for most anything. No wonder the little boys are so chipper. Archie favors his uncle, too. You'd know they belonged to the same breed."

"The boys are not really his nephews," said Em. "They just call him uncle because they like him."

"You don't say! Well, I s'pose their folks



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let 'em travel 'round with him for fun, and so's they can pick up a little money."

Em made no reply to this conjecture, and the woman went on: "Where do they live when they're to home?"

"He hasn't told me much about 'em," said Em, leaving the room on some pretext, to avoid further questioning. She was really much troubled about the children, and was daily growing more anxious and disturbed. The fact that her husband had left Melton so suddenly, and under suspicion, after saying a hurried good-bye to her, made her feel sure there was something wrong about his relations to the boys. It was a horrible thought that he had lured them away from their homes, but she was very much afraid that that was what had happened.

She was sure he had some reason for this action which would justify him, at least to himself, but she also felt certain that he would soon be discovered and dealt with as a kidnapper. She had been waiting until the young man should be strong enough to talk, and, if her conjectures were true, she meant to send the boys home without any delay.

On the day she had talked with Mrs. Carn she went to her husband's room and found him leaning against a pile of pillows looking very comfortable and happy. He was pale and thin, but



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his eyes were bright, and he had a vigorous appetite for the good and nourishing food she brought him. He had a seamstress's board before him, on which was arranged the mechanical toy which Mrs. Taggart had given Eddie. In the hurry and confusion of leaving Rattlesnake Den, he had not forgotten to put this in the wagon, with the other treasures the little boys had collected.

He could talk now in a low voice, and said, when he had finished his meal: "That steak puts a lot of strength in me. You're 'most as good a cook as I am. But wait till we're on the road again. I'll show you how to make a rabbit-stew that can't be beaten. I wish we could start tomorrow, though I don't know what they'd do without the kids to deliver milk for 'em."

"Will, the doctor says we must go South as soon as you're able to travel. It's almost September now. Don't you think the boys ought to be sent home, so they can go to school pretty soon?"

The young man laid down the knife with which he was putting the toy together, and looked at his wife sharply. "See here, Em," he said, "what are you driving at?"

"Why don't you answer my question?" she said, looking soberly at him.

"You've got something on your mind. Out with it. It 'll make you feel better," he replied.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Well, then, where did you get those children? You ought not to have any secrets from me now."

His face was as sober as hers as he replied: "See here, Em, suppose I stole 'em. What would you do? Would you leave me?"

"You know I wouldn't," she replied, indignantly. "That's not my idea of getting married. But what possessed you to do such an awful thing, and how could you fool the poor little fellows as you have?"

"Poor! You ought to have seen them when we started three months ago? They were the most starved and puny little things you ever saw. I believe Archie would have died if I hadn't taken him in hand, and now look at him. He was a perfect baby at first. Now he's a regular little man, and a brick into the bargain. He's got fine stuff in him if the conceit was only knocked out."

"But, Will, think of the awful suspense and sorrow of the parents. No matter how poor they are, they love their children as much as rich people, and by this time they must be simply distracted; and then—there's Mrs. Taggart. She's wild over Eddie. He looks like a little boy she lost, and she thinks she can persuade his people to let her adopt him."

"Worst thing that could happen to the child, but I suppose it would be good for her."



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"People were beginning to surmise that something was wrong, Will. It's a wonder to me that detectives aren't after you by this time."

"What do you want to do about it, Em?" said the young man, quietly.

"Let me telegraph right away to their folks. I'm sure they'll forgive you when they see what you've done for the children."

"And won't you leave your husband, although you've found out he's a kidnapper?" Uncle Weary looked at her eagerly, and she thought his voice trembled.

"What do you take me for?" Em spoke, vigorously. "I said when we were married, 'For better or worse.' I didn't suppose the worse would come so soon, but, if you can do such awful things when you're alone, it's a pretty good reason for my staying with you to keep you straight."

He looked at her silently, and then said, gently: "Telegraph, if you think you ought to, but before you do that I want to tell you something. Come here."

When she stood by his bed he said, in a low tone: "I didn't steal them. I'm carrying out a plan of Archie's father's doctor."



## CHAPTER XXVII

### UNCLE WEARY'S STORY

EM sank into a chair, and for an instant gazed blankly at her husband's laughing face. Then she darted to him and boxed his ears lightly, crying: "You miserable sinner! How dare you make a fool of me like that! You deserve to be pounded, and, if you were well, I'd give it to you this minute."

"Hold your horses!" said the young man, weakly, raising his arms to ward off her blows. "You don't know but I'm lying now."

"You can't bamboozle me again, sir! Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I was going to tell you in Melton, and then we left in such an awful hurry I couldn't, and since we're married you won't let me talk. It's your own fault."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to forgive you. But don't put it off any longer. Tell me, quick, all about it—or, at least, you may talk for a while—not too much. You're not strong enough yet."



## UNCLE WEARY'S STORY

During the long story that followed, the young wife learned, for the first time, much of the history of her husband. His life had been a disappointment to him, because, on account of weak lungs, he had been obliged to wander about in search of a suitable climate where he could live out-of-doors and, at the same time, earn his living. He had been compelled to give up teaching, and his chief occupation now was that of doctoring horses and cattle; but he had also picked berries in their season, and sold tinware to farmers in the Middle States and through New England. His father was well-to-do, and wanted to give his son all the money he needed, but the latter was independent and enjoyed taking care of himself.

“But how did you get hold of the boys?” asked Em, when they reached this point in the story. “I can’t wait any longer to hear about it.”

“That’s easy. I ran across an old doctor in the town where Archie’s father was raised. He knows my father, and he gave me a lot of advice about my health. It’s his notion for me to live in the open. Well, Archie’s father and mother told the old doctor about their sickly little boy, and how they’d tried all the doctors in Kingdom Come, and he didn’t get any better, and they wanted Dr. Pond to take the case as a last resort.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

The old man said at first that he wouldn't touch it, but they hung on, and finally he consented if they'd turn the boy entirely over to him for three months. Said he couldn't guarantee a cure, but, if they'd clear out, go to Europe or somewhere, and leave him a free hand, asking no questions, he'd see what he could do."

"And did they consent?" asked Em, in surprise.

"Yes, they did. The doctor is a rough old fellow, but he's soft enough inside. Archie's mother saw that quick enough, and took a great fancy to him. She promised to do any and everything the doctor asked, and they actually sailed for Europe without seeing the child again."

"How could she leave her sickly little boy with strangers?" said Em, in a tone of disapproval. "I suppose those city mothers are like that. They say they neglect their children and go off and leave them with nurses."

"Archie's mother isn't that kind. She's too much the other way. She gives up her whole time to his care, and coddles him too much. No, she just believed in the old doctor the minute she saw him, went off her head, as such folks are apt to do, said she knew he'd cure her boy if he would only try, and almost went down on her knees to him to make him take the case. She



## UNCLE WEARY'S STORY

insisted on starting for Europe as soon as they could get off, to show her good faith."

"Well, how did you come into the transaction?" asked Em.

"I happened to be in the doctor's house at the time, though I didn't see the Stebbinses. The old man thought, from their account, there was nothing the matter with the boy but too much fussing and medicine, so he asked me if I'd take Archie with me for a couple of months on one of my camping trips."

"You don't mean to say he sent a child like that off on a rough outing without seeing him," said Em.

"He seemed to think I had more gumption than you do," said her husband, dryly. "He knew I had experience enough in doctoring to tell, as soon as I saw the boy, if it was safe to start with him, and, if he didn't improve, to quit the experiment."

"I wouldn't suppose you'd like to be bothered with children," said Em.

"Well, I was rather lonesome sometimes. I like boys of the right sort, so I said I'd try him for a couple of weeks. If he had any good stuff in him, I knew I'd find it out by that time. If he hadn't, I meant to bring him back to the doctor."

"I'd have thought his aunt would make ob-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

jections to his going off with a stranger," said Em.

"That's where I was foxy. I told the doctor I wouldn't undertake the job unless I could do it in my own way. I didn't want any fussing or interference or advice from anybody. The parents believed in the doctor, and the doctor had confidence in me, so he told me to go ahead and he'd see that nobody interfered. I didn't have any trouble in fixing up the scheme to make the aunt believe it was all right. The boy came along without any trouble, and I believe he thinks he's had a good time."

"Well, I should say!" exclaimed Em, looking at her husband admiringly. It was not her way to express her satisfaction in stronger terms than this, so she said now: "Tell me about Eddie."

"I knew Archie would be lonesome without another boy, so I told the doctor to look up one. I wanted him to be sickly, too, so I could manage them alike. Dr. Pond knew about Eddie, and arranged with his uncle, and I roped him in without any trouble. He's a good little shaver, but he's a good deal of a cry-baby."

"I don't believe you appreciate him, Will. He thinks all the world of you, and I believe he'd do anything you asked him to."

"Don't you be alarmed. I appreciate him all right. I'm just as soft and foolish about him



## UNCLE WEARY'S STORY

as the next one. He ought to have been a girl, though."

"That reminds me," said Em. "Is the story true that you dressed Archie in girl's clothes when you first came to Melton?"

Her husband laughed. "I made him wear a sunbonnet to shade his eyes from the glare of the sandy roads. His eyes were pretty bad when we first started out. Afterward I made him wear it to punish him for being impudent and rebellious."

"That was pretty hard on him, Will. Boys hate to be called girls or to wear their clothes."

"But I had to teach the little tyke to obey. He'd never done it in his life. Regular spoiled child. It was rather tough on him, but I made him do the thing I knew he'd hate most. Besides, it was a good idea to disguise him till we got out of the neighborhood."

"How did you pay for your food as you went from one place to another?"

"That's easy enough. I generally doctored a sick horse or cow, and sometimes the cat, in exchange for butter and milk and garden truck."

The invalid was very tired now, and was not allowed to talk more that day.

After a good night's sleep he seemed to feel rested and strong, and when his breakfast was over, Em said: "Now tell me about Archie's



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father. He must be pretty well off to be taking trips to Europe."

"Well off! He's worth several millions, and Archie is his only child."

"For mercy's sake!" exclaimed Em. "What a responsibility to have the care of such a boy. His father must pay you well."

"He doesn't know anything about me yet. I settle with the doctor. But I sha'n't charge anything. The boy has earned his way, and more, too. He and Eddie have paid me in cash several dollars over what I've spent for them."

"But, Will, you know it's worth a good deal more than their little earnings. You ought to ask a fair price in payment. It's only right."

"I never took more than was coming to me, and I'm not going to begin now. You'd think it was all right if Archie's father wasn't rich. That doesn't cut any figure with me. Business is business," said her husband, emphatically.

"But now there'll be doctor's bills to pay." Em spoke, anxiously.

"That's all right," said the young man, serenely. "We've got a little pile saved for a rainy day. There's fifty dollars in a wallet I put in the feed-bag. I told the kids to take good care of it just before I had the attack. It 'll just about pay our expenses."

"Will," said his wife, nervously, "I've been



## UNCLE WEARY'S STORY

keeping something from you because I thought you were not strong enough to bear it, and I told the children not to tell you, but I think I'd better now. The boys lost the money before they got here."

"What!" said the young man, sitting up in bed and looking at her incredulously, "I can't believe you. How could that happen?"

She told him the story, then, of the holes in the feed-bag, of how the wallet had probably fallen through one of these to the ground when they had left their last camp in such haste, and how Archie had kept the news from him, fearing he was too ill to know; and finally, of the child's wonderful presence of mind and prompt action which had saved his life on that terrible night when he was brought to the farm-house more dead than alive.

The young man was very much moved. He made her tell the story again. "I knew he was a trump, but that beats all!" he said. "I don't know what his father 'll say, he'll be so proud of him. And to think we came to this house as tramps and beggars!"

"Yes, and see how the Carns took you in and did for you as though you belonged to 'em."

"Money can never pay 'em for that," said her husband, "though, of course, I can give 'em back all they've spent, and more, too. But they didn't



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know that, and didn't expect to get a cent from us. I'll soon be on my feet and earning enough to pay our debts."

"You can't do that, Will. The doctor says we must go South before cold weather. But don't you worry. I can get all we need."

"Where from? You send all your money home, don't you? It's lucky you had enough to get here."

"I didn't have. When the telegram came I had only five dollars, and the train started in an hour. I didn't know which way to turn. Mrs. Sampson saw I was in trouble. You know she has awful sharp eyes. She made me tell her, and then she insisted on loaning me twenty-five dollars, and said she'd send more if we needed it. Then she packed my satchel and almost put me on the train."

"Em, think how we've made fun of her!"

"I know it. I am as ashamed as can be."

"It beats all," said her husband, in a whisper.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE BEAR-HUNT

THREE busy, happy, peaceful weeks had passed since the wanderers found shelter and comfort under the roof of the big-hearted Carns. The invalid was now much improved in health, and able to walk about to make preparation for the journey south with his wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Stebbins were expected home from Europe in a week, when Uncle Weary meant to take Archie to Dr. Pond and then start southward without seeing the parents. He was very much afraid of effusive thanks and the offer of more money than he thought was his due.

Em had written to Mr. and Mrs. Taggart about Eddie's homeless condition. She had told them that the uncle of the boy would be glad to give him to any one who would take good care of him, and they had hastened to reply that they were overjoyed at the possibility of adopting him, and would take him to his uncle at any



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appointed time, to make such legal arrangements as were necessary.

During the summer Archie had sometimes wondered why he had received no letters from his parents or been required to write any. Uncle Weary had told him that his father and mother were travelling in Europe; that it was not necessary for them to write to him, or bother him about replies, so long as they knew he was well and happy.

There was always something interesting going on at the farm. One day it was salting the sheep; the next, perhaps the bees would "swarm" and all hands be called on to rattle on pans and otherwise make a din to induce the migrating colony to settle within reach; then there was the fun of riding home on a load of hay and helping to "mow it away."

They bathed every night in the "swimming-hole," and there were squirrels and chipmunks to shoot and trout to catch when there was nothing new to do.

A range of wooded mountains rose from the meadows back of the house, and Archie was fond of going there to the "wood lot" with the hired man. But Eddie never went on these excursions. All his life he had been afraid of imaginary bears, and here, he was told, were real ones, living up among those dark trees. He shuddered



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whenever he looked in that direction. It made no difference when people told him the bears were harmless and shy, and ran away when they saw any one. Bears were bears, and something terrifying even to think of. So, when Archie went with Ivan for a load of fence-posts or of wood, Eddie would amuse himself by making little boats with his knife in the barn or by watching the operations of canning fruit or making jelly in the kitchen.

The tender-hearted Mrs. Carn would never allow any one to talk of bears when the sensitive boy was present. "I expect he's been scared to death about 'em when he was a baby," she said. "He'll get over it when he's older, but there's no use in making children miserable more than's necessary."

It was true that the little brown bears of the mountains usually did no mischief and seldom left the woods. But lately every one in the valley was startled by hearing that one bold trespasser had made an exception to this rule. He had entered a pasture and carried away a lamb.

After this the farmers no longer felt safe, and at every house they talked about hunting the offender until he was found and killed. The excitement mounted to fever-heat when, one morning, Mrs. Carn rose early to gather pennyroyal with the dew on, and saw the tracks of a bear's



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foot in the soft earth of a garden-bed. She then remembered that the pigs made more noise than usual in the night, and, going to their pen, she found one little squealer gone. Looking down, she saw tracks all about, and could trace them to the barnyard fence, over which the thief had evidently climbed and made his escape to the woods.

Mr. Carn was greatly excited when his wife waked him with the astonishing news. "Where's my gun, Maria?" he exclaimed, as he started to rise. Then, remembering his disabled condition, he sank back and cried, impatiently: "I declare, I can't stand this any longer!"

"I guess you'll have to, pa," said his wife, gently. "It's too awful bad, I know, but—"

"Call Ivan," he interrupted. "Tell him to clip it over to Cap'n Prout's. The old man will be a good hand to manage a hunt. They ought to hev had it afore."

Captain Prout was at the breakfast-table when Ivan, breathless from running, came to tell him that a bear had taken a pig from the Carns' farm, and that he was wanted to organize a hunt for the animal at once. The old man had just been laughing and jeering at the statement made by his grandson, who was known to have a vivid imagination, that he had seen a bear in the road that morning early when he was milking.



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"There, what did I tell ye?" cried the vindicated boy. "Next time, perhaps, you'll believe me."

"Well, I vum!" said the old man. "Who'd 'a' thought it. A bear hain't been seen in the open here for nigh onto twenty-five year." He put on his hat and, with his son, hurried to Mr. Carn's house, where several other neighbors had been summoned for a council of war. The plan was quickly made that all the men, boys, and dogs in the valley should be notified and asked to come that afternoon and, under the direction of Captain Prout, hunt the hairy robber until he was captured.

"Don't tell the little boys," said Mrs. Carn. "Eddie is timid, and Archie is nervous. I'm afraid they'll be scared."

"What you talkin' about, Maria!" exclaimed Mr. Carn, indignantly. "I don't know about the tow-head, but t'other little rascal wouldn't ask any better fun than to be in the hunt."

If they had wished to do so, they could not have kept the matter from the children. The air was full of it, and when they came home at ten o'clock they knew that telegrams, telephones, bicycles, and horses had been used to summon all capable citizens in the township to gather at the Carn homestead for a grand bear-hunt. Much to Mrs. Carn's surprise, Eddie was not alarmed at



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the preparations for war. Indeed, he felt relieved. He knew he should sleep better after the hunt. Real bears were, after all, not so bad as imaginary ones. The former could be killed, while the latter were always at hand.

From the time Archie was four years old he had been familiar with stories of bears, from the "Big Bear," the "Middle-sized Bear," and the "Little Bear" of his nursery book, to the great, savage grizzly that his uncle George had shot in the Rocky Mountains. He had often played with the skin of this beast, and was never tired of hearing the story of its capture. He had never before dreamed of the possibility of sharing in sport of this sort until he was grown up or, at least, was much older than now, and it seemed to him sometimes as though he could not wait for that time to come. But now, if Uncle Weary would only say he might go with the other boys to this hunt—why, it was impossible to believe such a wonderful thing could happen.

But it was not necessary to plead for this permission. Uncle Weary said he expected him to go, of course, and to be sure to shoot the old pig-stealer in the head. He did not even tell the boy to be careful. He only said, when they were ready to start: "All you have to do at a bear-hunt is to obey orders. You know how to do that. I can trust you."



## THE BEAR-HUNT

Mrs. Carn was much distressed to have so young a child go on this rough expedition. "Why, honey," she said, "ain't you afraid? That big feller 'd eat a little tad like you in one mouthful if he got a-hold o' you."

"I can shoot now," said Archie, confidently. "I've killed three chipmunks and two squirrels. I'm sure I could hit such a big thing as a bear."

"You better let him alone, mother," laughed Mr. Carn. "I'll bet on you, you young Nimrod," he said, shaking Archie's hand. "You're made of the right stuff. I wish I could go along with you."

The boy felt as though carried on wings as he ran beside Ivan to join the other hunters. Of all his happy summer, this was the happiest moment.

Fifty men and boys, and perhaps twenty dogs, had collected at the appointed hour in the lane a quarter of a mile from the house.

"Now, boys, don't git excited and fire on the critter in the timber," cautioned the captain. "There's too many human bein's around to resk that. He can't possibly get away from so many on us. Wait till the dogs start him, and head him for the open if ye can. He'll turn on the dogs most likely, and then, if it's in the right place, some on us 'll fix him."



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"What 'll we do if he tackles us?" asked a boy in the crowd.

"Ye needn't be consarned. These b'ars are all cowards. He won't turn on ye unless he's cornered. Ye want to yell bloody murder to scare him and keep him runnin' down the mountain. If he takes to the river, we've got him sure, for then he'll be a fair mark for the hull on ye and no danger to anybody. Now I guess you better hurry some afore he gets wind of what's goin' on."

At this word of command the company started up the mountain, through a rough pasture, as swiftly and silently as possible, as the orders were to keep still until the game was found.

Eddie had cleaned and loaded the little rifle as his contribution to the hunt, and Archie carried it proudly over his shoulder as he ran with the crowd. He knew the woods well, so, when they reached them, he and Ivan were soon in advance of the others, and making their way rapidly toward a thicket of blackberries where the dogs were going, evidently scenting the animal in that direction.

"There he is!" shouted Archie, as they caught sight of a brown body scudding among the trees.

A young man who joined them now shouted: "He's makin' for his den! Head him off, Lion!" he called to his dog.



## THE BEAR-HUNT

Then began a great sound of barking and yelping some rods away. Archie fairly flew over the ground, and came to the scene of battle before the others. All the dogs had attacked the bear at once, and the boy reached the spot just as the animal turned at bay. He was standing on his hind-legs and knocking off the dogs right and left with his powerful paws. But he seemed to be in a panic the moment he saw Archie and heard him shout, and he started to run, this time down the mountain toward the little river. The whole company dashed after him pellmell, and the frightened creature made for a marsh near the stream.

“Kill him! Kill him!” screamed Archie, who was now almost up with the dogs.

Most of the pursuers hesitated when the bear plunged into the swamp. But Archie rushed on, springing from one hummock to another, until he came to a more solid bit of land, where the bear stood at bay, his back against a tree, fiercely fighting the pack of howling dogs.

Several young men quickly followed and began firing at the bear, which was now a good target. Archie had already fired, and his little bullet was the first one of the half-dozen which brought down the enemy.

For a moment the air was filled with smoke and the smell of gunpowder. When that cleared



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away, most of the hunters had dashed through the swamp, shouting and cheering wildly as they gathered round the fallen foe.

"I swanny! he's the biggest and oldest feller I ever saw," said the captain, who had come puffing and wheezing to the scene. "He's the robber, sure enough. Ye won't hear from the rest on 'em after this."

"Ye can bet ye won't," agreed another old farmer. "We've scared 'em so they'll be afraid to show their noses out of their dens."

"Who fired the first shot?" asked the captain. "You did, did ye?" he chuckled, as the men pointed to Archie. "Wall, if ye kin do such a job as that when yer a baby, I guess folks 'll have to stand round when yer growd up."

"He's the spunkiest little red-head I ever saw," said the first speaker, laughing. "By gracious! I never saw anything like the way he took after that bear. I thought he'd git on his back and ride him out to the open."

"It's a wonder he didn't," said another. "He was just plumb crazy with excitement, and I expected he'd blaze away with his gun any minute. But he seemed to have sense enough to obey orders, and waited till the right time, along with the rest on us."





“THE HUNTERS WERE SHOUTING AND CHEERING WILDLY”

G. H. RANKS/08







## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE TROPHY

MR. and Mrs. Stebbins landed in New York a week sooner than they were expected, and at once took a fast train for the home of Dr. Pond. During their three months of absence in Europe they had been obliged to content themselves with the brief notes of their family physician, saying at the most, "Your boy is doing well," or, "Your son is gaining. You will see an improvement in him." But not a word as to treatment or his whereabouts.

They kept their agreement, however, and asked no questions. But now that they were home again and almost within reach of her son, the mother thought it hard to be told by the doctor that she must wait a little longer.

"The boy is on a farm off the railroad, just now," he said. "You'd better take a livery and drive there. You can make it in five or six hours with a good team."

Mr. Stebbins hurried away to engage a car-



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

riage, and while she waited his wife tried, by stratagems and wiles, to gather some item of news about her boy. But the old doctor was obdurate. "Go and see for yourself," he said, laughing. "You've waited pretty well, I know, but I guess you can stand it a few hours more."

There was no moving him, as Mr. Stebbins knew, and with the crumb of comfort given them that the boy was no worse than when they left him, and, on the whole, was somewhat better, the anxious parents took their comfortable carriage, with a pair of fast horses and a reliable driver, to find the little village of East Pemberton.

The horses were fresh and strong, and took the travellers at a rattling pace over the excellent mountain roads. Four o'clock found them within half a mile of the Carn homestead, when suddenly, with no warning, the hitherto steady horses began to rear and plunge madly, becoming at once unmanageable and threatening to overturn the carriage.

It happened so quickly that Mrs. Stebbins was hardly aware of their peril before her husband, with great presence of mind, grasped her waist, and, taking advantage of an instant when the horses were backing, succeeded in lifting her safely to the ground. He placed her on a log by the wayside, and ran immediately to the assistance



## THE TROPHY

of the driver, who exclaimed: "What in tunket ails 'em! They're most scared to death about somethin'. I never see 'em act like this afore."

"It must be that crowd coming down the road," said Mr. Stebbins, as he struggled with the frightened horses, while the driver tried to calm them with soothing words and repeated "Whoas."

"It can't be that," he said. "They're used to folks, and they ain't no noise can scare 'em."

"Perhaps the harness—" began Mr. Stebbins.

But the driver interrupted him in a tone of enlightenment as the approaching crowd came nearer: "I see what's the matter. They've had a b'ar-hunt over there, and they're bringin' the critter home. They ain't no hoss alive 'll stand the smell o' wild beasts. That's what's the matter with my team."

The party with the bear now saw the predicament of the travellers, and, realizing the cause, halted in the road.

Mr. Stebbins said, quickly: "You'd better turn round and drive back a mile or two. My wife can easily walk the remaining distance to the farm-house."

"I d' know but I'll hev to. See ye later," said the man, as he wheeled the horses round and disappeared in an instant down the road.



## THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS

"Oh, tell me what it is, dear! What frightened them?" said Mrs. Stebbins, still trembling, as her husband joined her.

"Horses are afraid of wild animals, and they seem to be bringing a bear toward us," said Mr. Stebbins, pointing in the direction of the returning hunters, whose shouts and laughter could now be plainly heard.

"*Bears! Real bears?* Oh, I'm afraid of them, too! Let us run!"

"You haven't the strength for that, Lillian, after your fright. Sit down again. There's no possible danger from a dead bear."

"Are you *sure* he's dead?"

"Yes," said her husband, scanning the procession carefully. "His feet are tied together, and he is strung on a long pole, which is carried on men's shoulders. But there seems to be a live cub riding on the bear. Look, Lillian!"

"Oh, my dear, how can you ask me to look? You know my horror of all such animals," she said, covering her eyes with her hands.

"But, Lillian," he urged, "it's a wonderful sight. You ought not to miss it. You'd look at it in a play, and it's much more picturesque than anything you ever saw on the stage. It's like a barbaric procession in the Middle Ages, with the dark mountain for a background, and a crowd of shouting men, in all sorts of ragged costumes,



## THE TROPHY

with guns over their shoulders, and boys and dogs leaping around them; the dead bear and cub carried on the young men's shoulders, and the—Heavens! What—”

Suddenly Mr. Stebbins ran toward the bear. The face of the red-headed little cub had turned toward him, and he recognized his own boy.

“Oh, daddy! daddy!” shrieked Archie, his cup of joy now full. “I shot him! I helped to kill him! He’s most as big as Uncle George’s grizzly, isn’t he?”

Mr. Stebbins raised his hand to his forehead, looking dazed, as he faltered: “Why, this isn’t—Why, how did you get here?”

“How did *you* get here?” echoed Archie, jumping to the ground and giving his father a genuine bear’s hug.

The men and boys stood in a circle around father and son, silent from astonishment, and Mr. Stebbins was too much absorbed to speak to them as he took Archie’s hand, saying, “Come to your mother,” and pointed to where she sat, several yards away, her eyes still covered to keep out the dreadful sight.

But Archie held back, saying: “Oh, I want to show her the bear. Can’t we take that along, too?”

“One at a time, my son,” said his father,



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laughing. "I imagine you'll be all she can stand at once."

"You go and see your ma, bub," said the captain. "We'll stay right here 'til you get back to tell us what to do with your b'ar."

"Lillian, Lillian, look up!" exclaimed her husband, taking her hands in his. "I've brought you the cub. I thought you'd like him for a pet."

The meeting was almost too much for her. She cried and laughed hysterically as she clasped the ragged, grimy little boy in her delicate, silk-clad arms.

"Oh, it can't be! It can't be!" she repeated, again and again. "This brown, sturdy, farmer's boy my pale little Archibald! I can't believe it."

"Yes, isn't it a miracle?" said her husband.

"Oh, we can never pay dear old Dr. Pond enough for this!" said the mother.

"Who is Dr. Pond?" said Archie. "I never heard of him. I haven't had any doctor or taken any medicine all summer. Eddie and I have just lived with Uncle Weary in Rattlesnake Den till we came here. You'd better pay him."

"Uncle Weary! Rattlesnake Den!" repeated his father, looking puzzled.

"Why, didn't you know we were camping-out?"



## THE TROPHY

"No, Dr. Pond wouldn't tell us anything," said his mother.

"That sounds like one of Uncle Weary's surprises," laughed Archie. "Well, we lived in a cave, and Eddie and I earned a lot of money picking berries and catching trout for the hotel, and then folks said Uncle Weary stole us, so we had to come here, and Eddie and I deliver milk for Mr. and Mrs. Carn, and Uncle Weary says that pays for our board."

Archie had always believed in the good sense of his parents, but now he could not help thinking they were a little silly to laugh as though they would never stop at his simple statement.

"What's the matter, daddy?" he said, a little impatiently.

"Well, my son," said Mr. Stebbins, as he wiped his eyes, "you must admit it is rather upsetting for us to leave you rolled up in a rose-leaf and come back to find you selling milk and hunting bears."

"Who is Eddie, dear?" asked his mother.

"He's the nicest boy I ever saw. I like him next to Uncle Weary. His father and mother are dead, but Mr. and Mrs. Taggart are going to adopt him."

"The Allen Taggarts from Boston?"

"Yes; they came from Boston in their auto."



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"And are the Carns nice, too?"

"Oh yes, indeed. Why, mother, when we got there in the night Uncle Weary was awful sick, and they thought we were beggars—we had lost all our money, you know—but they took such good care of Uncle Weary, and they sent for Aunt Em, and she and Uncle Weary were married, and the doctor says he'll get well now, with Aunt Em to take care of him—"

"Oh! oh! those blessed Carns! What angels there are in the world! But tell me more—all about everything. I can't wait a moment," said the mother, pulling the boy down by her side on the log.

"But, mother, you haven't seen the bear we killed."

"*You* killed a bear?"

"Sam and Bob Peters and Jack Drake and I shot him. They're going to give him to me because I was the first to shoot. They're waiting for us over there. Come and see him."

He took her hand to help her rise, but she remained sitting, and shuddered as she said: "Oh, you mustn't ask me to see him, dear! I couldn't."

"Why, mother! Not see *my* bear?" said the little boy, very much injured.

"Oh, yes indeed. Why, mother, when we got him."



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Mr. Stebbins had left them to talk with the captain and the other men, and Archie walked with his arm around his mother's waist to the bear, who lay by the roadside.

"He is a beauty," she said, bravely glancing down at the big, formidable-looking beast.

"We'll make his fur into a rug for your bedroom, won't we, mother?"

"Yes, indeed. It will be a beautiful one. I shall love it. But now I want to hear all about my darling's summer with that wonderful Uncle Weary and those dear Carns."

"Will you walk to the house, Lillian, or shall I send for a carriage?" said Mr. Stebbins, joining them.

"Oh, let us walk, by all means," she said, showing him her thick-soled shoes. "Then we can talk as we go along."

"Aren't we going to take our bear with us?" asked Archie, anxiously, as most of the company scattered for their homes.

"He's a pretty heavy load for the men to carry," said Mr. Stebbins, "and so I've arranged to have him hauled in a wagon. He'll be there soon after we are."

The child looked so disappointed that several young men insisted on carrying the bear again on the pole.

"The boy has earned the right to have his own



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way," said the captain. "'Twon't hurt them young fellers a mite to lug him."

So, with the precious trophy before his eyes, Archie walked with his parents down the road. There was too much noise and excitement to make conversation possible, and, when they approached the house, Archie seemed very much preoccupied.

"Daddy, will you please take mother to the wagon-shed to stay till I come for you?" he asked.

"What a strange thing to ask! Why?"

"We don't want to make them a particle of trouble, darling," said his mother, thinking the boy intended to give the Carns time to make some preparations for visitors before they appeared.

"No, it's not that," said Archie; "I just wanted Uncle Weary to see my bear first."

"Oh, isn't he delicious!" exclaimed Mrs. Stebbins, laughing, as she and her husband turned back.

With Archie leading, the rest went on to the house. The noise had brought out Uncle Weary and the others; and, while they laughed and wondered at the strange procession, the men advanced and laid the bear on the ground, and at the same instant Archie flung himself on Uncle Weary, exclaiming, breathlessly: "Oh, Uncle Weary, we've got the bear, and I helped kill him!"



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A slow smile crept over the invalid's face as he looked down on the great beast and then at the slender, quivering little boy at his side. "Pretty good for your first big game," he drawled. "But don't you think it's pretty rough for a big fellow like you to hit a little one like that?"

Archie laughed with the rest. He understood Uncle Weary, and knew he was much pleased, and that meant more than all the petting and congratulations of the others. They were all about him now, everybody talking at once, and asking all sorts of questions. Suddenly he tore himself away and exclaimed: "Oh, Uncle Weary, I have another surprise for you!"

"What business have you with surprises?" began Uncle Weary. But Archie had darted back, and returned at once with his father and mother.

"This is Uncle Weary!" he shouted.

The young man looked about as though trying to escape, but the parents both grasped his hands and held him, and in answer to their broken words he said, in a low tone: "There are no thanks coming from you. I guess he's done as much for me as I have for him."

And then the delightful outing came to an end as abruptly and unexpectedly as it had begun.



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Through the combined tact of Mrs. Stebbins and the good sense of Em, Uncle Weary was persuaded to accept an invitation to spend the winter on one of Mr. Stebbins' Florida estates, where the doctor predicted he would grow strong and well under the excellent care his wife would give him.

Mrs. Stebbins was also able to induce the Carns to accept more than they thought was their due.

The boys found it very hard to say good-bye, but the parting was brightened at the last by a promise that they might camp again with Uncle Weary at the Den. Perhaps the next summer. So Eddie smiled through his tears, and Archie waved his hand bravely as he was whirled away in the automobile.

THE END







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